

CANADIAN LITERATURE N^o. 32

Spring, 1967

NEW WAVE IN CANADIAN POETRY

Articles

BY RALPH GUSTAFSON, WILLIAM H. NEW, JOHN HULCOOP,
D. O. SPETTIGUE

Reviews

BY DOROTHY LIVESAY, HUGO MCPHERSON, GEORGE WOODCOCK,
MARYA FIAMENGO, WAYNE BURNS, PETER STEVENS, FRANK DAVEY,
WALTER YOUNG, ROBERT L. MCDUGALL, DAVID M. HAYNE,
JEAN-GUY PILON, JOHN MATTHEWS

Annual Supplement

CANADIAN LITERATURE CHECKLIST, 1966

A QUARTERLY OF
CRITICISM AND REVIEW

INCUBATION

Gerard Bessette's latest and completely different novel is one which displays its author's mastery over the stream-of-consciousness technique, not with periods or punctuation but pouring along to make an intriguing fascinating and entertaining book for you to read (which you can do by ordering *Incubation* from your bookseller right away) it costs only \$3.95 which is well worth the brilliant translation done by Bessette's friend Glen Shortliffe of Queen's University and published by Macmillan of Canada.

INCUBATION

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THE MALAHAT REVIEW

AN INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY OF LIFE AND LETTERS

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The Malahat Review commenced publication on January 1, 1967. It is part of the *Review's* policy to publish literary documents of special importance to scholars as well as fiction, drama, poetry, and memoirs from countries throughout the world. Thus in our first year we are printing a number of previously unpublished letters by D. H. Lawrence, a selection of previously uncollected poems by John Clare edited for us by Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield, and a searching article on Metaphor and Suggestion by Krishna Rayan which compares and relates Sanskrit to Anglo-American theory on this subject. Other contributions to the first year's issues include: the first English translations of a play by Strindberg and of an important essay on Cervantes by Unamuno, a new translation by Austin Clarke of a Cervantes Interlude, exclusive photographs of Henry Moore's most recent sculpture, a translation by Michael Hamburger of a Radio Play by Günter Eich, reproductions of work-sheets by Thomas Kinsella and John Betjeman, an illustrated memoir of Miro and his printmaking by Ruthven Todd, sections of a Central African journal by Paul Theroux, an unpublished one-act play by the late George Fitzmaurice, poetry by Laurence Lerner, Glyn Hughes (U.K.), D. J. Enright (Singapore), Richard Weber (Eire), Robert Fitzgerald (U.S.A.), James K. Baxter (New Zealand), David Summers (Canada), translations of poetry from Germany, Mexico, and the Philippines, short stories by Andrew Fetler, Fred Rebsamen (U.S.A.), Barbara Jump (U.K.), Heinz Poin-tek (Germany), Veljko Petrovik (Yugoslavia), and essays by Frank Kermode, William Plomer, G. Wilson Knight, and Bonny Dobrée.

The Malahat Review measures 6 by 9 inches, contains a minimum of twelve full page illustrations in each issue and is set in Baskerville and printed on Rolland Zephyr Book paper by Morriss Printing Company of Victoria.

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THE MALAHAT REVIEW

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editorial

TO OTHER EDITORS

TEN YEARS would once have seemed an extraordinarily long life for a Canadian literary magazine. As late as the early 1950's, lack of patrons, lack of public interest translated into subscriptions, and even lack of writers and material made the existence of any magazine in this country precarious in the extreme. *Here and Now* vanished after a few quixotically elaborate issues; *Contemporary Verse* and *Northern Review* lived longer, but expired in the mid-50's from publishing difficulties as well as from personal circumstances in their editors' lives. *Tamarack Review* was founded to take their place, and the broad list of its first editors showed the wide feeling in Canadian literary circles ten years ago of the need for a magazine to fill the almost complete vacuum left by the expiry of *Northern Review*; they included not only a central core of Toronto writers and publishers, but also an "advisory" circle of writers outside Toronto consisting of Alan Crawley, James Reaney, F. R. Scott, A. J. M. Smith and myself. Later the advisory editors were dropped (my own experience is that such positions are rarely more than titular in any case) and Robert Weaver became the editor with a local board of associates. In this form — and with a tendency to become Toronto-oriented as well as Toronto-based, the magazine has steered through most of the decade which it has finally completed and which it now celebrates with its tenth anniversary issue.

The issue is large, as befits a celebration, and astonishingly good value for \$1.25. A touch of nostalgia has gone into the selection of contributions. Obviously the editors have been gathering material over a long period for this occasion; and a good moiety of the important figures in Canadian poetry and fiction over the past decade are represented. There are unpublished works by poets now dead,

such as Anne Wilkinson and E. J. Pratt, slices of interesting works in progress by Kildare Dobbs, Brian Moore and Mordecai Richler, an amusing fragment of a journalist's journal by Robert Fulford. Only one item in the issue is so pointless as to tempt one to accuse the editors of burning incense to an author's vanity; rather than spoil a festive occasion I refrain from naming the writer. I can only wish *Tamarack*, with the warmth of one who was in at the beginning, another decade as long and successful as that which it has already enjoyed. More I do not wish, since twenty years is probably as long as any magazine can maintain its vitality; Cyril Connolly, perhaps over-precipitately, closed down *Horizon* after ten.

Writing recently in *Le Devoir*, Jean-Guy Pilon (editor of *Liberté*) remarked that of the three best English-Canadian literary magazines, two are published in Vancouver. The three magazines he listed were *Tamarack*, *Canadian Literature* and *Prism*. If one is to accept this flattering judgment, it can only be, from the beginning of 1967, with a hesitation prompted by the appearance in Victoria of a magazine which, from its first issue, looks as if it will make the trio into a quartet. *The Malahat Review*, appearing just after *Tamarack*'s tenth anniversary, is published by the University of Victoria (with funds whose rumoured lavishness has stirred the envy of rival magazines throughout Canada) and is edited by John Peter and Robin Skelton, both of them contributors to *Canadian Literature*.

The Malahat Review is announced in an introductory circular issued by the editors as "Canada's first thoroughly international quarterly of life and letters". If one can judge from the first issue, its claims to this title are formidable, since only one of the contributors appears to be a Canadian by birth; and the general scope of its contents resembles that of such cosmopolitan magazines as *Partisan Review* or *Encounter*. The editing is imaginative and professional, the design is conservatively pleasant, and the production is that of Charles Morriss at his best. The contributors include William Plomer with an autobiographical essay, Maria Kuncewicz with a nostalgic sketch of Seville, and Ruthven Todd with "a reminiscence" of Miro which is characteristically mostly about Todd; the poems by eight non-Canadians and one Canadian (David Summers) are a remarkably good selection; there is a group of hitherto unpublished letters from D. H. Lawrence to S. S. Kotlianski. If such a standard is maintained, *The Malahat Review* should be publishing its own decennial issue in 1977.

The claims of *The Malahat Review* rather boldly affront those of *Prism*, which in recent issues has been calling itself *Prism International*, and which has certainly been broadening its field to include more translations and more American

contributions than in the past. *Prism* has also been going through another kind of transition. Until recently it was one of Canada's best amateur magazines — amateur in the sense that it was run *con amore* by literary non-professionals. Its editors usually knew a good thing when they saw it, though they did not always have the same facility in detecting a bad thing; they took chances, which quite often came off, and encouraged a respectable quota of emergent writers. Now *Prism* is changing status from the amateur to the apprentice; it has become a house organ of the Department of Creative Writing at The University of British Columbia, linked to that peculiar academic-literary between-world, the writers' workshop circuit. This is likely to be a narrowing influence countering the broadening effect of internationalism. Of the contributors to the most recent issue, no less than four are involved as teachers or students in creative writing programmes at the Universities of Iowa and British Columbia, and even those who are not so involved produce too often the kind of campus-obsessed writing which has become an American cliché during the past twenty years. In the current issue one story begins: "Registration was less than twenty-four hours off and the campus was coming to life." Another begins: "It was around six when Tom got home from the university and he was tired mentally and physically, as he almost always was after a faculty meeting." Both stories are as dull and parochial as they promise.

Prism is also publishing good material — a Montreal story by Hugh Hood and a translation of a story by the French Canadian author André Major are outstanding in this issue — but its new editors should beware of the constricting vision which often makes writers immured in universities forget that most of real life and even of real education still go on outside the campus gates.

G.W.

NEW WAVE IN CANADIAN POETRY

Ralph Gustafson

I THINK OF KING CANUTE. The son of Sweyn Forkbeard was not the backwater he is thought to be. He is supposed to have faced the ocean waves and regally ordered them to quit their task of pure ablution round earth's human shores. Being a hardheaded Scandinavian with much experience in his blood of tides and the affairs of man, he knew better. He assembled his court and, with a proper object-to-object relationship and concrete instance, demonstrated what happens when the monarch of all he surveys orders the waves to cease their allegiance to the moon. The irony was lost on his courtiers, and, as far as one can judge, is still lost on all good conservatives.

Canute was being a good poet. He was also being a good critic: obstinate and alert, with authority to demonstrate the absurd.

Though the possibility exists, since the Scandinavians got around and did more than their share to provide amusement for the wives while they dealt with the husbands, as far as I know I can claim no descent from Canute. Two affinities, however, come to mind. The *Tinglid* to protect the marches and borders, I am in favour of. And I have stood for hours gazing at the North Sea.

The occasion I recently had was the preparation of a revised edition of *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*. Since the first edition, compiled a year or eighteen months previous to 1958, the publication date, I have been aware that a revision to include the work of the new generation of Canadian poets was needed. In the inexplicable way Nature has of doing this, a cluster of poets seemed

to me to have been born similar in importance to the cluster born around Confederation and to the cluster born around the First World War. Because of those unmanageable restrictions publishers always come up with, for the revision I was given far too little leeway: sixteen pages added to the first edition, with some opportunity for internal thefts and manœuvres and dispositions requiring a foot-rule and scissors-and-paste. If I had little liberation, I was, however, strictly put to the necessity of examining acutely the poetry new since 1958.

Twenty-five years ago when in the *Pelican Anthology of Canadian Poetry* I first published abroad the work of English-Canadian poets, the survey was made with comparative ease. There was then nothing like the present national vitality in manuscripts, readings, subsidies, prizes, broadsheets, pamphlets, private presses, periodicals, and books of poetry from the commercial houses. Centres of activity were few and localized. Apart from *The Canadian Forum*, there was nowhere to look for published "advanced" work. The current anthologies were out of date; in fact, my ambition was to undermine them. The only permanent light in the gloom had been provided by Smith and Scott's *New Provinces. Contemporary Verse, First Statement, and Preview* had not yet appeared. Isolation was the problem: pretty much as it was in Lampman's day. The general cultural climate of Canada was one of provincialism, complacency, or indifference. During the decade following World War II, those negative forces were well in retreat. When next I made an anthology of poetry, the book was able to take advantage of a true perspective of the past, a present of rich provision, and was able to assume a confidence in the future which one or two critics, deploying themselves from abroad, felt bound to temper. The confidence has been proved anything but misplaced. The last ten years have produced a poetry that makes historical all questioning of Canada's poetic calibre. The poets already established write frequently poems of commanding quality. The younger poets on the scene possess a vitality recognized even this early as an "explosion." Of the vitality, there can be no doubt. Of the way they are choosing to explode, I am not so sure.

THE FACTOR distinguishing the new generation of poets (apart from the quotient of the time the poet has had to practise his profession, which I disregard as the poets, I think, would wish) is one of methodology. This can be defined, broadly, as the swing from the Yeats/Eliot axis to the Pound/Williams

axis. The content of the poetry is as it always has been. Birth, copulation and death with all the questions, anguish, elations and extinctions which those processes impose, still and obviously make up the emotional context of the new poetry. Nor would I except the social disillusion. There is nothing radically different in this poetry from the corruption found by Chaucer in his social environment or from the anguish that Tennyson went through because of his. As a matter of fact, the young poets find themselves less oppressed than Hardy did. This despite World War II and its bomb. What World War II imposed is an intensification of response. It is in the urgency and intensification that the difference lies; the degree of our folly.

Disillusion is irreducible; the inherited past is totally questioned. But the debris is being removed. We are in the midst, or at the beginning of, the re-creation. So radically have protests been lodged that the negations are proving no longer sufficient. One can't mistake these new poets. The dialogue is of the greatest interest. It is as if caught between allegiance to a secure cynicism and declarations of their own future. The universe is cold and indifferent. These poets declare an exaltation in objectivism to nature. The stars are mechanized. But the machinery is wonderful. Dogs treat their own kind better than man his. Love is the answer. It looks as if God is dead. But he isn't. It is only that man has not made Him work. No one ran up and shook Christ's hand, Mr. Kearns tells us, since he had his hand nailed down too. Mr. Kearns goes on to tell us that now he gets Christ's message: how this "love-junk" can really hang you up for good. Black humour. Not at the expense of God. Mr. Tom Marshall's "Astrology" too leads us in an interesting direction. The philosophies are "de-commissioned at last."

Interlocking roses
of our summer day
are no less blasted in the tides of dust.

Why not take up penmanship, ornithology? Only the fullness of transience will do.

So give me
conjunctions of dust; make again
the knotted turning of the seasons start;
give me the whole fire of your heart.

"To be mad for an answer," Mr. Newlove defines the position. No one pays any attention. Yet

Good company, fine houses
and consequence people,
you will not turn me
into a tin factory . . .

except for the shooting,
how much will your funerals cost

in your consequential houses?
I know where the god is
hiding, starved. I have slept
in the turning mountain.

Intense is the de-commissioning of philosophies the world has run on. As intense is the determination not to be negated. These poets assert the positive Self and they ask no quarter. What they demand, as Miss MacEwen writes, is

sweet wounds which burn like stars,
stigmata of the self's own holiness,

and which

appear and plot new zodiacs upon the flesh.

There is no answer except in "peculiarities and particularities" (John Newlove). On the other hand, it takes more courage

than red
wheelbarrows
give
to love:
flesh & dust

(Pierre Coupey).

It is as if the new Canadian poets are being forced to what they won't believe. It is as if nullity is being *imposed* on them. They will have none of it.

By those who want a disillusioned affirmation, these fresh sensibilities are not to be ignored.

INTENSITY DIFFERENTIATES the content of the new poetry. The urgency is unmistakable. It is this intensity that explains the radical acceptance of the prosodic revolutions in contemporary poetry. Yeats had the leisure

to prophesy and warn of the Second Coming with traditional formality. These poets have not. They are in the midst of the advent of the Pitiless Beast. Immediacy and objectism are the demands; freedom from the traditional linguistic formalities. Hence, Ezra Pound and his renovations: the shift in poetic processes from "formal" to "open" composition.

I am convinced that this shift in methodology is (and was) needed and salutary. I am not at all convinced that what is being made of this formal revolution is salutary. I am second to no one in his admiration of Ezra Pound. He is the greater maker. But some grave warnings are in order. Claims are being made on behalf of the disciples in Canada that are unfounded. We are being admonished that everyone not Poundian is benighted. No poet he. Claims are being made that the New Wave is writing *better* than anyone with dry feet. (I trust I have made it clear that I am on the side of renovation, immediacy, experiment, encouragement, willingness, even violence. One other note: by "disciples" I mean the laying on of hands not only by Pound but William Carlos Williams, Olson and Creeley and the Black Mountaineers, Birney and *Delta* and *Tish*, or however the descent. Pound is the great progenitor). The "Poundians", by and large (a qualification on behalf of those poets I have already quoted, if relevant, and one or two others), are *not* writing well.

Harm is being done. The *New Wave Canada* poets are being pushed into a coterie (they seem willing enough). Labels and righteousness and pieties are taking over. This would not be good even if the Poundians were writing well. I now am not speaking of content, emotions, exultations or exaltations, propulsions or environments. I am speaking of structures. The new formalities have as their correct objective the achievement of greater interference with the instant of cognition. To name the procedures leading to this, "syllabbling" or "kinetics" or "field composition", is valid. But the debate being made of this is a debate over nomenclature. The principles are nothing new. Losing sight of this has led to critical arrogance. The tiresome witness of this is the seemingly unending hostile alignment of poets who have washed dishes for a living and those who eat (generally less well) in the Universities. A poet is either good or he is bad.

A more serious damage is being done by æsthetic arrogations. The claim to be exclusively right on the part of the Pound axis repeatedly refers to music: cadence, natural phrasing, "the pressures of the breath", rests and pauses, the space, the broken line to notate rhythm, thematic counterpointing. I think this aspiration to achieve the condition of music eminently right. Poetry strives toward the condition of music. We have returned to the æsthetics of Pater, at least in this respect.

“Reprendre à la musique leur bien,” says Valéry. The æsthetic of modern poetry is to take back its own from the greatest of the arts; to overcome the displacement by metres of tempos; aural statics, deafness. Nothing new, of course. *Vide* “Beowulf”. But a new start made necessary by the similes and rhetoric of the Victorians and the poverties of the Georgians. The movement goes back to Poe, his “suggestive indefiniteness”, passed on through the French Symbolists to T. S. Eliot; goes back through the Provençal poets to Pound. “To compose in sequence of the musical phrase, not in sequence of a metronome,” says Uncle Ez.

Poetry, however, is not music. Two mistakes have been made. First, the error of thinking that notation is music; secondly, the error of thinking that language can communicate as music communicates. It can't. Poetry uses language. Poetry, however much we strain to prevent it, to be itself carries a burden of logical meaning. Music uses the logic of aural structures and is thereby dramatic. This language cannot do. Without its integument of syntax and grammatical structure, poetry is undramatic. Without the drama of syntax there is no tension. Poetry must resolve more than sound and rhythm; it must also resolve its linguistic meaning. I do not find this sad. I find this inevitable. The poet has the greater challenge. We should have remembered all about this. We reject Swinburne and Carman.

Doors and windows
 Builded Bliss.
 But where's
 The bloody edifice?

This misadventure with music has led to the broken line, the jettisoning of metre, the placement of spaces and rests and pauses on the printed page which have so bemused and bewildered the conventional reader. The advantages gained have been several: natural breathing, the physiology of cadence, modulations and juxtapositions. The method of counterpoint, the fugue, the canon. Some of the modern poetic structures are as strict as serial music. Mostly, these “liberated” poems are unholy messes — the result of not perceiving the difference between music and language, the typewriter and rhythm, the lungs and the intellect: D. H. Lawrence's “swoonings” and Eliot's “Quartets” (I am not being religious). A warning should be directed at the New Wave poets presently “exploding.” What we are getting is implosion. The poem itself is injured.

The errors are in mistaking the conditions of music for those of language and in mistaking notation for music. On these two errors hang all the flaws of the prophets.

I QUOTE FROM POETS of the “new direction” which the introduction to *New Wave Canada* assures us is “at least vigorous and very sure of where it is going.” There is no question of the vigour. But listen:

Fragments, all I have, the chips
off the block, the truth
in my words, of it.

You must find your
own words, & breath
for the words,
for it.

(Mysteriensonaten #10)

sung as the shrill
bird . the word
offers the ear
cheer, as it be

(a song)

determines the rhythm
the encounter moves to—

(song)

The sun is mine
And the trees are mine
The light breeze is mine
And the birds that inhabit the air
are mine

(Song)

For my friends
whose marriage is dissolving in the hills
all this water is superfluous

(Song)

These are not the whole poems, and the poems are not inaccessible in meaning. They are just tone-deaf.

To illustrate fairly the lapse of dramatic tension because of the crippling of syntax, entire poems of some length should be quoted. Inadequately, I give a fragment:

Dog with three legs
 with a name as round as
 his head is as round
 as his eyes are

his many
 many other
 bignesses
 his eyes
 come into
 his eyes, look
 at you, you
 look back
 (etc.)

After the first four lines, the sound is nowhere the meaning. But what I illustrate here is the danger of relying solely on visual (rhythmical) structure for tension. When syntax lapses, tension lapses. Drama of the *intellect* is missing.

It is significant that the three poets in *New Wave Canada* who are impressive are each alert to the meaning that is in the music of words and syntactically dramatic: David Dawson, George Jonas, and Michael Ondaatje. I judge that they know the rules to be broken.

My criteria in judging such adventure (vitality) consist of three negatives. I consider dead (though it may look alive typographically) the poem (1) in which the liberation (disenfranchising of syntax, referants, metre, punctuation, or whatever convention) defeats communication, or so delays it that the poem is injured, or so assumes an arrogance that the reader is left to write the poem: when the theoretical poetry is so inaccessible that Frost's "immortal wound" has to be self-inflicted; (2) in which the structure or the lack of structure of the line goes against natural phrasing, the instinctive physiological *and (nota bene)* intellectual pacing; (3) in which the manipulation is not accumulation and is not worth the poetry gained.

These experiments and impulses and indifferences and disenfranchisements must not get out of hand. It would be too bad. We will have protests and not poetry. We are being presented with poets, with serious and needful significances to communicate, doing so in poetry that is ugly in sound, ugly in shape, unchallenged in craft, and impoverished of drama.

One or two trespasses and then I am done. The enormous amount of confessional verse; personal complaints against the universe; "the private soul-at-

any-public-wall." The world is a terrible place. It is redundant just to discover that. Secondly, my own weary complaint: the inverted romanticism: if it is ugly it must be realer than if it were not; the city of Toronto made responsible for the acne on a girl's face.

One can write well and be young:

"all the lonely rose time of summer"

"thank god for the birds at dawn"

"the falling rain's a harp for me"

Youthfully, the emotions of these lines are what they should be. Expressively, a poet should not be found dead with them.

It is toil, this poetry. And, says Pound: "Mais d'abord il faut être un poète."

The 1966 winner of the University of British Columbia Medal for Popular Biography is D. J. Goodspeed for his book *Ludendorff: Genius of World War I*, published by Macmillan. This is the second time the medal has been awarded for a book treating a non-Canadian subject, and again the work demonstrates a maturity of approach and a lucid style. Ludendorff has warranted a thorough biography for some time; his proud dedication to the war and to the aims of his country as he received them, complemented by his military acumen, led to his being one of the most powerful and catastrophically influential men of this century. In a surprisingly sparse year for biographical writing in Canada, *Ludendorff* is alive with character, certain in its details, objective in its judgments, and sympathetic in its approach. Thoroughly documented and indexed, it will still reach more than an academic audience. Mr. Goodspeed has, in recreating Ludendorff's complexity and in examining his involvement in his society and his influence upon the century, written a well-paced narrative and an absorbing book. The Selection Committee this year was C. W. Humphries, of the Department of History, D. G. Stephens and W. H. New of the Department of English, at the University of British Columbia.

A LIFE AND FOUR LANDSCAPES

Frederick John Niven

William H. New

FREDERICK JOHN NIVEN is today almost unknown. That fact alone would warrant a critical investigation of him, but a study thus motivated could easily end by being merely an arid exercise. Fortunately, in Niven's case, the justifications for reappraisal are many. He warrants it because he was unusual in Canadian letters. He lived by his writing without being a hack; he was a conscious prose stylist at a time when stylists were few; he was concerned with problems which affected his time, not (for all his apparently "regional" settings) with merely local issues; he was a man with wit, humanity, intelligence, and a willingness to exercise all three — and if this caused him to rebel quietly against orthodox social codes, to emigrate from the London literary world of the 1910's to the hinterland of British Columbia, and to dare to write honestly about the life that he knew existed, then so much the better for his fiction. He was also the friend of such diverse literary figures as Hugh Walpole, Christopher Morley, and I. A. Richards; the recipient (until he emigrated) of regular and favourable reviews both in the *TLS* and from such critics as Rebecca West; and the colleague of John Murray Gibbon and John Buchan. For all this, the man is a paradox, and difficult to assess. It is probably inevitable that thirty-three books of fiction, two of verse, and a vast array of non-fiction should vary in quality; sometimes his characters were nothing more than stereotypes, and sometimes, too, he found difficulty in reconciling the fiction he was writing with the facts in which his work found its base.

This last item brings us to one of the most interesting features of Niven's work. Available criticism amply points out the difficulties in using historical data which the author faced in writing his trilogy — *The Flying Years* (1935), *Mine Inheritance* (1940), and *The Transplanted* (1944) — about the opening of the Canadian West. Comments by Desmond Pacey (*Creative Writing in Canada*) and Edward McCourt (*The Canadian West in Fiction*) show that Niven's contact with the Canadian environment allowed him to create realistic scenes and moods in these novels, and that his characters, lifted from history books or else pared to meet the demands of the factual events, tend to be wooden. Western Canada was not the only environment he knew at first hand, however, nor was it the only occasion upon which he drew from his own experience for some of the material in his books. My communications with Mrs. Pauline Niven, the author's widow, have substantiated what his autobiography, *Coloured Spectacles* (1938), suggests: that many of the characters other than the historical ones were basically pictures of his own family. In the most successful books there was some metamorphosis; the characters come alive in their own right, and the four landscapes Niven knew well — South America, Scotland, southern England, and western Canada — he sensitively recreated as fictional settings. To examine only the works set in Canada would be to limit our assessment of Niven's ability and our appreciation of what he accomplished. To trace the events of his life and the forms those events took in his work not only reveals some of the character of the man, but also suggests the scope of his literary aims.

South America appears most rarely as a setting, and always in combination with some other place. One of his best books, *Triumph* (1934), uses it well. It traces the life of a would-be musician frustrated by home and family, re-creates the social levels of an English society — consular, but not always diplomatic — in Latin America, and reveals how the man's children in various ways succeed him. The country does not correspond with any specific real one; instead, it lives separately, created on the page. The distant Andes are there, and the heat, and the shimmer of colour, and together they contribute palpably to the novel's success. Landscape is one of the characters in a sense, but in this book at least it does not *replace* the people as the focus or the reality. Works such as the pirate story, *The Island Providence* (1910), set partly in the Caribbean, or the western, *Hands Up!* (1913), which mentions a brother who dies in Panama, are more credible for their scenery than for their characters, and as works of art are better ignored. But they do raise the question of source of detail, which even a cursory investigation of Niven's life quite clearly answers.

The brother who died has a prototype in Niven's own brother, who died in Panama when Niven was still quite young. The family in *Triumph* is clearly but not exactly parallel to Niven's family, which was connected with the British consular service in Valparaiso when Niven was born there on March 31, 1878. The youngest of three children (his sister outlived him by several years), Niven did not leave Chile until he was almost six, when his family sent him to school in their native Scotland. Later they returned to Scotland themselves. His father was a manufacturer of sewed muslin there, and a lenient man; his mother was a devout, rigorous, and rigidly orthodox Calvinist.¹ Understandably, the home they supplied in Chile is only dimly remembered in Niven's work; that which they gave their son in Scotland — different in surroundings but probably not very different in kind — was one he remembered with much more detail: with wit, nostalgia, some affection, and no little asperity. In time, the two homes were to lead to substantially different environments in the fiction. *Triumph* is a later work than many of Niven's "Scots" novels, a feature which contributes to its difference from them in thought and in direction indicated by the fictional resolution. By 1934 Niven had emigrated to Canada, and his renewed contact with the worlds of the western hemisphere caused him, in his fiction, to seek within his environment rather than outside it for the solution to the problems he raised. Early protagonists, like Martin Moir in *Justice of the Peace* (1914), cannot succeed because they cannot escape their environment; Heriot, the musician in *Triumph*, fails because he does not exercise his ability in spite of his environment, and his artistic son can only truly know success when he can perform equally well in his father's old world or away in any other. Niven comes to this implied change in attitude partly because of personal experience. Ultimately, with his wife, he determined on one place to settle. But to do this he had to leave a beloved Scotland and an active London behind him, and he had also to escape a particular kind of home.

ONE SUSPECTS, without much clear basis for doing so, that Heriot is partly a picture of Niven's father. *Coloured Spectacles* mentions in passing the manufacturer's voracious appetite for literature and his linguistic facility, but nowhere is there an explanation of what Niven merely calls the man's "restlessness". There are in the fiction, however, some sympathetic portraits of softgoods

manufacturers — Ebenezer Moir in *Justice of the Peace*, Walter Maitland in *The Story of their Days* (1939), and John Simson in *The Staff at Simson's* (1937) — which amplify our picture of his father's business and perhaps of the man himself. Certainly the other members of Niven's family appear as characters — the brother in *Hands Up!*, an unsympathetic sister in *Dead Men's Bells* (1912), and his mother almost everywhere, which makes a consideration of the factual mother-son relationship and of that in the novels a convenient and central introduction to the significance of the Scottish settings in Niven's total work.

Rachel Moir is the fictional extreme. Rebuking and then completely disowning her son Martin, she almost prevents artistry from being developed in him and she certainly goes a long way towards destroying him. Mrs. Niven, similarly, reacted strongly against Frederick's creative talent, but she was not exactly like Rachel, for she also possessed many finer qualities. According to Mrs. Pauline Niven, for example, the fortitude of the title figure in *Mrs. Barry* (1933) and the illnesses and sensitivities of the son, were the result of Niven's consciously drawing upon memory of his mother and of isolated incidents from his own childhood. But the lady's less admirable qualities and the somewhat more ambivalent ones were also to appear in the fiction. Mrs. Niven opposed any venture that was not demonstrably practical and which was not sanctioned by the dour doctrines of Calvinism, and so her vocational ambitions for her son, after he left Hutcheson's Grammar School, were bent towards stern theology or worldly practicality. They were entirely opposed to Niven's own inclinations. In his autobiography, he (typically) understates the case:

I wanted to be a painter; I wanted — we had no Great War then — to be a war-correspondent. . . . My folks, sensibly enough, pointed out to me the extremely precarious existence of a painter — even of a war-correspondent — and compromised: How about an applied art? Or how would it be if, to begin with, I went to the Glasgow School of Art in the evenings, on trial, to see if I had the stuff in me, and was apprenticed to the manufacturing business? Designers were required in that business. I recalled that Alexander Smith had been a pattern-designer — which helped to make me amenable to parental reason, and dutiful. But my mother, I believed, regretted that I had not followed in the footsteps of her folk, alumni of the old Glasgow College, never entered its university. I broke a tradition of her family then — when we humoured each other. That's life.

“Regret” was often open antagonism and it contributed to the break that occurred between the two.

In *Dead Men's Bells*, Niven depicts a comparable break over a philosophical-religious question between Robert Lindsay, the hero, and his mother. The con-

flict comes to a head when Rob discontinues his ministerial training because “there is too much of the old necromancy in the theologians” — which was heresy in the mother’s eyes. Later, detecting her son in a lie he felt compelled to use in order to avoid further conflict, she laments:

“Your second cousin . . . wrote at that very time, as if the Lord wad try my soul, as was Job tried of auld, speiring if you was thinking of the future. . . . He . . . said he could put ye in the way of a captaincy. But no — no’ after a lee. . . . Ye will see the justice o’ this. Believe me, your mither, that every sin has its punishment.”

“I ken it,” said I grimly.

The Scotland of this family, like that of the Murrays in *Two Generations* (1916), is “that land where Calvin once gloomed”, and the heroes, like Lindsay or Ted Murray (or like Niven himself), find this incompatible with their own nature. “Heretical” Rob argues with his uncle Tom about this:

“I am like the lad in an auld twelfth-century French ballad . . . — I had rather be in the company of the happy than wi’ the constitutionally gloomy.”

“I do not ken the auld irreleigious ballads of France. . . . Life is stern and sober, and shunnor or later you will find that it is so, and that you have a soul to save or damn for all eternity. . . .”

His advice given me then, as the first cobbles of the street of Eaglesham rang under our tread, made me think that God must laugh, which struck me as a great thought. . . .

But this was “a night of many stars, and the Milky Way was like a plume of feathers, and you can talk little Calvin to a young man in the open and under stars.” To Rob, then, nature offers solace, and to nature he escapes for the adventure that occupies the major portion of the book.

Other heroes cannot escape in this way when they discover, as in *Ellen Adair* (1913), that over their family hangs

the curse of Calvin and a misconceived Christ. . . . The children of such families, if they love beauty, either love it very tenderly, with a minor key in their voices, or are carried off their feet, and are as moths round a candle.

The choice for freedom, or submission, or destruction, belongs to the individual, and as a child in such a house, Niven had himself to choose. Aiming for freedom, he found he could indulge a vivid imagination in solitary play. Remembering this after some years, in the significantly-titled *Coloured Spectacles*, he sees the humour, the humanity, and the loneliness involved in such a situation:

When I was a boy and could travel only on the atlas, Deadwood Dick took me up winding roads between scattered bull-pines into quick-rising hills. The trees were very tall. The forest glades were very quiet. I sometimes wish I had a complete set of the stories in my library now to turn to occasionally from some of the discoveries of the coteries which are thrust at us with an intolerance worse than that which accompanied the advocacy of *Ministering Children*. . . . His flights into the hills were tremendous. They atoned a hundredfold for the egg-like weals upon our wrists delivered by a soulless mathematics master for deficiencies in trigonometry. . . . I followed Dick through the solitudes of tall timber awash with the scent of balsam, on into the thickest forest, on into the canyon. . . .

Up this canyon, then (the stairs up to, and the corridor of the top flat, leading to my bedroom, used to be the canyon), Deadwood Dick guided me. He went over a "divide" (at the top of the stairs), and came down into a "pocket" in the hills, a grassy little valley (where the passage widened), and there, having unsaddled, he left his horse free to graze. . . .

Deadwood Dick strode to some bushes and breasted into their midst. I strode to my bedroom door and breasted against it, having first turned the handle. The bushes whipped back into place and right ahead was a precipice and a cave — for Dick. I presume he kept his treasure trove in the cave but I have forgotten the details of his loot. What he gave me, to last for ever, was a horse, big timber, and silent mountain paths.

Such exploits were only for childhood, and not for Niven's youth, at which time conflict with his parents became most acute. But he began to enjoy solitude, and in spite of the delicate physical constitution which had plagued him since his removal from Chile, he loosed his immense reserve of energy by walking from Glasgow out into the countryside. Walks that Martin Moir could take in *Justice of the Peace*, or Robert Barclay in *The Three Marys* (1930), or Bliss Henry in *A Wilderness of Monkeys* (1911), draw upon these excursions for the observed details that make them come alive. A move of his parents from Glasgow to Edinburgh gave Niven new vistas, for

instead of the Mearns Moor I had the Pentland Hills and soon, extending my tramps, I had the nearer Borders, Tweedside from Symington to Broughton . . . and on to Peebles.²

It gave him new material to draw on later, too, for Peebles was to become the setting for important scenes in *Ellen Adair*.

Although the "art question" had been curtailed for a time when it was discovered that Niven had a degree of colour blindness (regarded by his parents and sister, Mrs. Pauline Niven says, as a "disease"), he still had no interest in

the business to which he was apprenticed. In *Coloured Spectacles*, he notes his feelings:

Tremendously though manufacturers interested me, and warehousemen, and packers, and weavers, I was not enthusiastic about manufacturing. The intention was for me to pass through the various departments and *learn the business*. I began with winceys and it was Charlie Maclean, head of the wincey department, who informed me, gazing at me solemnly one day, "Freddy, the plain fact is that ye dinna gie a spittle for your work."

Like the hero of *Justice of the Peace*, Niven attended night classes at the Glasgow School of Art, studying under Francis Newberry; after a while, like Ted Murray in *Two Generations*, he quit the warehouse to work in a library: "The only trouble was that sometimes I would be lost in a book when I ought to have been attending to a subscriber." To assist in the payment of his art school fees, Niven also worked part-time in a jewellery store, and this experience was to appear first in *Ellen Adair* and *Justice of the Peace*, and then as the background for a full novel, *Old Soldier* (1936). But the question of becoming *either* a painter *or* something practical stalemated when doctors recommended that Niven move to a drier climate. He was therefore sent in his late teens to the home of some missionary friends of his mother's in the Okanagan Valley of British Columbia, and the move, which cured his ailments for a time, was markedly to affect both his work and his life.

THE MOVE WAS NOT, this trip, a permanent one, but it did give him a number of experiences which were to lead to his becoming an author at all. For one thing, it introduced him to new settings and to another response to life, but for him the contact with North America was more important than this at first indicates. In fact he was to spend the next two decades moving back and forth from Canada to England, trying to settle down and trying to reconcile his attachments to several worlds. In his fiction, during this same period, he continually returns to two equally thorny and obviously related situations. The person in his books who rebels against Calvinism and yet remains within the Calvinist world dooms himself to attritive conflict, and the person who flees to the wild west runs the danger of being "diseased" by an aimless and therefore crippling wanderlust. Ultimately Niven could find a satisfactory solution within both Scots and Canadian settings, but this was in works which were written well after he

at last decided to emigrate. In the early Old World settings, characters like Rob Lindsay had to flee from their restricting environment in order to be successful; such characters as Harold Grey in *A Tale that is Told* (1920) are merely worn away by their environment when they remain within it. In the later New World settings, contrastingly, flight is an irresponsible act, not a constructive one. Robert Wallace in *The Transplanted* (1944) would be a failure if he left the small B.C. town in which he lived, for he would then be deserting a society to which he should and can contribute. Reflexively this solution begins to work in the later Old World settings as well, and so John Maitland in *The Story of their Days* (1939) discovers a niche — controllable, but still alive, unlike that of Harold Grey — within a larger world with which he cannot entirely agree. The difficulty here, of course, is in reconciling a responsibility to society with an equally nebulous responsibility to self.

In Canada on his first trip, Niven travelled as much as possible and worked at whatever job presented itself — on the railroad in the dry Thompson Valley near Savona, in a lumber camp near Shuswap Lake, in ditch-digging crews in Vancouver. He rode rods and walked ties with acquaintances whom in *Above Your Heads* (1911) and *Wild Honey* (1927) (published in Great Britain as *Queer Fellows*) he named Hank, Slim, Billy, and Foureyes, and in *Wild Honey* he recounts in detail two of these trips: from Savona once to Vancouver and once through the Camp McKinney gold fields to the Kettle River Country. Writing later for *Saturday Night* (July 5, 1941), he remembers his first jobs in Vancouver:

after a spell of ditch digging I had change of manual labor in shovelling macadamised rock off scows that were brought by tugboats and moored sometimes near where the Yacht Club boats lie now, sometimes at False Creek. In those days Indians used to watch us at our shovelling — with commiseration in their dark eyes I used to think. Yet what a miserable youth I was when owing to a strained muscle in my back I had to forsake manual labor and take a job indoors.

His heart and lung trouble, however, seemed in the meantime to have disappeared.

Homesickness of a kind drove him back to Scotland again, and it was after his return (aboard a cattle boat from Montreal, as described in *The S.S. Glory* [1915]), that he first took up journalism. “Three Men in a Shack” appeared as sketches of Western Life in the *Glasgow Herald*, and success led him to editorial work on various Scottish and English papers. In 1908, he was discovered in the London literary world by Mrs. Isobel Thorne, the fiction editor for Shureys’ Publications. Mrs. Pauline Niven writes:

My mother . . . began to write for various magazines and ended up editing one of them published by the firm of Shureys'. As the firm grew and expanded my mother's position grew. . . . She was also responsible for Frederick's first book — *The Lost Cabin Mine*. He offered it to her but she urged him to try the English publisher, John Lane, who published it and the one that followed it [*The Island Providence*] which he wrote in Devon on the advice of John Lane who was, I believe, a Devon man. I can't remember how long Frederick was in Devon, under a year, I think. I was still at school but he sent his Mss to me and I typed it in the evening.³

These were active years. His first novels appeared, strongly influenced by the work of Stevenson and by the Deadwood Dick stories; he was publishing also in such periodicals as the *Pall Mall Gazette* and the *Morning Leader*; and in 1911 he married Mary Pauline Thorne-Quelch, then eighteen years old and fifteen years his junior.

He spent several months of 1912 and 1913 travelling and freelance writing in Canada — four novels appearing during these two years. He had returned to London before the war broke out in 1914, but, his heart trouble recurring again in England, authorities rejected his application for military service. He served in other capacities, therefore — as Assistant Food Controller in the Ministry of Food attending to the distribution of rationed goods; and finally in the War Office under John Buchan as Associate Editor of Articles for Allied and Neutral Powers. Five more novels, a book of verse, and a collection of short stories that were written about 1912 appeared before the end of the war, and two more novels, including *A Tale that is Told*, which won the enthusiastic admiration of Rebecca West, soon followed. Quality, critical reception, and popular approval fluctuated greatly, for several works were frankly money-making pot-boilers. But even these have a place in the development of Niven's thought; they demonstrate along with the more serious works the division between Old World and New World settings which Niven consistently used.

MAY 1920 is a significant date for observing any change in his work, for it was at that time that Mr. and Mrs. Niven came to Canada together and stayed to settle. Initially it was to be only a three-month visit, on a commission from John Murray Gibbon of *The World's Work*, to gather material for more articles on Canada. Several visits back to the Old Country, however, only confirmed their choice of a home at Willow Point, on the beach of Kootenay

Lake a few miles from Nelson, B.C. In many ways this mountainous area is like parts of Europe, but Niven notes a difference when he speaks of what called him back to the West:

The Alps are in a pocket of Europe, and seem almost a kind of sleeping partner of Messrs. Cook; but the Rockies run the length of the continent, and are in league with Eternity. . . . What is the lure? It is a sense of freedom. It is the pines mounting up the steep hills, and the smell of the pines and the quiet under them. . . . It is the rank tea, tasting like nectar after working in the woods. It is the wagon-roads, the two deep ruts, going down through the sands of the Okanagan, or up into the Cariboo, or twining through the pine-needle floors of the tall timber tracts in the Selkirks, the Cascades, or the Pallisers. It is the trails leading off from these, with the gashes blazed on the trees, blaze by blaze showing the way, as lighthouses con ships through sea channels. It is, as in Murray Gibbon's song, "the lakes of melted jade", these lakes that the winds play with, as a hand ruffling and smoothing velvet. It is the lonely call of loons in the hush before twilight, when the grasshoppers all suddenly cease to chirp. It is the mosquito-hawk that zig-zags overhead, with a flight somewhat like bat or swallow, in the drizzle of a reflected sunset. It is the clear air that lets the eyes roam over great spaces. It is the moon rising to silhouette a ridge of firs and light their tips all down the slope — and the wonder of it all getting into one's blood.⁴

Significantly the details of his life now begin to appear in his nonfiction writings, largely in periodical essays and related to his contact with natural environment. The wilderness was what inspired him to write (and writing was by this time his sole source of income); at times, as *Coloured Spectacles* showed, it also reminded him of the Scotland he still loved:

There is a season of the year . . . when . . . Scotland comes to me. . . . The creeks, tom-tomming in the gulches, clutching wanly at protruding rocks, delaying in trembling amber pools become, in fancy, Highland burns in their glens. Kootenay Lake is changed to a Scots loch. A stipple of rain is on the polished water; the hazed slopes, seen through that *smoor*, might be of heather, with a birchwood yellowing here and there. Nothing is asked of imagination save to turn the odour of weed-smoke to that of peat — and the trick is done. All Scotland is mine then, from forsaken St. Kilda and the roar of the Atlantic on its cliffs to the piping of a piper, on a Saturday night, by the Broomielaw.

But the separation from the old world still existed.

Living in Canada had its drawbacks, one of which was the tendency for his reputation in England to suffer. Niven sets forth his friends' advice and his own reply in one of his verses in *A Lover of the Land* (1925), which is noteworthy only for its biographical fact:

"Come you back from hill and beach,
 Come and let men know your name,
 Here in London seek your fame,"
 But I cannot seek her there,
 In the heavy thrice-breathed air. . . .
 No, I live the life I write,
 Writing little for delight
 In the living with such things
 As that great hawk's patterned wings.

The natural world sets up a different kind of isolation, and it caused Niven to find in his many friendships with such persons as Mr. George Gooderham, Dr. W. O. Rose, and Dr. I. A. Richards, a reaffirmation of the necessity for human contact.

Innumerable climbs in the mountains of the Nelson and Windermere areas, trips to Calgary where he learned sign-language in order to communicate with the Blackfoot peoples,⁵ occasional travel throughout B.C., to the Yukon, and to Hawaii, together with his vast memory of lands he had previously known led to a number of non-fiction articles and books: *Canada West* (1930), *Colour in the Canadian Rockies* (1937),⁶ and *Coloured Spectacles* (1938) — which, except for *Mrs. Barry* (1933), was the first of Niven's books since 1920 to be given a *TLS* review. More fiction had also appeared since he emigrated; *The Wolf* and *Treasure Trail* came out in 1923 (like many of the Westerns, first written serially for New York papers), followed by a second collection of poems, and fourteen more novels. Of these, *Mrs. Barry* and *Triumph* were among the first Canadian novels to be selected as Book Society choices.

There is a development of thought in the later novels that culminates in the posthumously-published *The Transplanted* (1944), but this work is technically much weaker than many of his other novels. Always conscious of word choice (*Mine Inheritance* was completely rewritten from third to first person, for example⁷), though never what one could justifiably call a stylistic innovator, he died before revising *The Transplanted* into a final form. The heart and lung weakness which had dogged him during his life caught up with him again. In a letter to Christopher Morley in 1929, he had written:

A long talk I fancy this may be. I have the time for it! I am laid up. I seem to have overdone it on my last High Country expeditions and have enlarged my heart. It feels enlarged in more senses than one. I lie here with a very full heart indeed, thinking, thinking — and remembering, remembering. Sometimes I feel

it might burst. Extreme athlete's heart the doctor calls it. You know I am crazy about the High Country — away up above timber. . . .⁸

He recovered; he continued to live, to climb, to enjoy life, to write, to acquire what Jay MacPherson, in the *Literary History of Canada*, calls his "human and literary maturity", but repeated heart attacks at last caused a move from Willow Point to Nelson, and in 1943 to Vancouver, where he died in St. Paul's Hospital on January 10, 1944.

Niven's "maturity" is most evident in an ability to evoke atmosphere. He recorded dialect well, but this was just one part of his clear perception of the world around him. His sense for the human and the natural landscape, for the world of his youth and the world of his adult life, was accurate and strong. It led to the immediacy of his descriptions of nature and to the artistic success of many of his character sketches both in fiction and non-fiction. His contact with Canada not only introduced him to a new environment and a new set of characters, it also started him writing; it heightened his sensitivity to the nature of landscape and to its influence upon people; and, in time, it altered the way in which he chose to resolve his characters' conflict. He himself absorbed the landscape in which he lived, and in his two best and most productive periods, 1913-1920 and 1930-1939, he demonstrated an appreciation of the power and beauty of descriptive language.

The problems he recounted in his work were very largely ones he had himself met and tried to solve. This does not mean that the events of his fiction are wholly autobiographical, for they are not, but they do bear a distinct relationship with the particularly itinerant life that he himself led. If matters ended there, the fiction would be exceedingly limited in scope. In many ways, however, Niven's life, and the problems he met, were typical of his age; his works have interest as Edwardian and post-Edwardian social documents, therefore, and (more importantly) the questions they concern themselves with are still significant today. One of the problems his heroes, like Rob Lindsay and Martin Moir, face, for example, involves their reaction against a code of values they find stultifying. This to some extent is an objectification of Niven's own conflict with Calvinism, but it also serves as a microcosm for his society, which was at this time reacting in different ways to moral codes that were much more overtly liberal than those current during the nineteenth century. Life was altering rapidly, and in some quarters this was equivalent to chaos. For Niven himself it meant disorder — but it also allowed another order to come into existence. The restlessness that led him part-way round the world he could ultimately control in the "sanctuary" of a peaceful

home in Canada. For his character John Maitland, "disorder" was an unhappy marriage and a world at war, both of which seemed to negate the values which he felt he knew through art. Yet for him, too, a reachievement of order is possible; "Broad Sanctuary," which is Maitland's resting-spot in London, is, though a retreat, no escape from the world, and it becomes an image of another stability that can emerge from change.

As Niven also found out, the determination of a way of life lies in large part within the power of the individual, but a person often finds that in a complex environment he must choose not between right and wrong but only between two wrongs. This problem, too, Niven's fiction explores. Robert Wallace in *The Transplanted*, for example, is forced at the last to choose between friendship and truth; he cannot have both, and a denial of either one is contrary to the dictates of his conscience. He cannot remain neutral about the question either, for this would leave him in limbo; in order to find happiness — a third intangible — he must and ultimately does make the necessary choice. Again we can see Niven's personal reaction against one system of belief lying behind this, but like the other conflicts he presents in his fiction, it is not at the last completely personal or local. Instead, the problems his characters face are those that arise anywhere when an individual and a social conscience are at war within a solitary man. As a novelist Niven did not always present these with artistic skill; sometimes he did not even escape triteness and flatness of characterization. But his work still is worthy of attention, for at its best it transcends the doubtful fictional virtues of documentary and apologia. His imagination at those times goes beyond the facts he remembers and allows him to create out of his several landscapes an arresting and credible world.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Conversation with Mrs. Pauline Niven, May 28, 1962.
- ² "John Buchan — In Memoriam," *Saturday Night*, LV, no. 22 (March 30, 1940), 6.
- ³ Letter to the writer, July 7, 1962. *The Lost Cabin Mine* was first published in 1908, antedating by one year the date listed in Watters.
- ⁴ "The Call of the West," *The Canadian Magazine*, LV, no. 3 (July 1920), 224.
- ⁵ One of the tribes accepted him as a member and gave him the name *Apasto* (= "Talking by Signs"). See "Amerindian," *Dalhousie Review*, XIX, no. 2, (July 1939), 145.
- ⁶ (Toronto: Nelson, 1937), 125 p. Watercolour illustrations by Walter J. Phillips.

Not listed in Watters. Reprinted in 1962, this is the only one of Niven's works to be presently in print.

- ⁷ MSS are in the U.B.C. Library. *Mine Inheritance* was also made into a radio play for broadcast over the C.B.C. in three parts: January 8 and 14, 1959. Part III is undated.
- ⁸ Quoted by Christopher Morley, "The Bowling Green," *Saturday Review of Literature*, VI (December 28, 1929), 603.

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PHYLLIS WEBB AND THE PRIESTESS OF MOTION

John Hulcoop

PHYLLIS WEBB's most recent and most complex book, *Naked Poems*, confirms a preoccupation with certain themes — love, poetry, and love as poetry — which was already evident in *Even Your Right Eye* (1956): “Moments are monuments . . . Caught/ pressed into words/ made crazy in colour/ Made act/ as in love.” The *Naked Poems* clarifies and perhaps finalizes a tendency apparent in the earlier volume towards reduction of refinement as Miss Webb's characteristic solution to certain technical problems arising out of her particular emotional and intellectual temperament: “doubled up I feel/ small like these poems/ the area of attack/ is diminished.” This solution reflects the poet's attitude towards life. No moment is too short, no event too small, no experience too trivial, to merit the poet's attention. The poems are “small” not because the subject-matter is unimportant, but because the poet's eye sees precisely. Apparently casual and often brief, her glance is exacting and uncompromising. She refuses to magnify or over-state. Hence the absence of sentimentality in her treatment of some kinds of experience (lovers' parting) which might tempt a less honest poet to romanticize:

Then you must go.
I sat cross-legged
on the bed.
There is no room
for self-pity
I said
I lied

In "Poetry," published in the 1956 collection, Miss Webb writes: "Fidelity/ as in love/ is in poetry/ an unexpected satisfaction." Her own fidelity to the bare and sometimes seemingly inarticulate facts of daily experience — "a/ chair, a lamp, a/fly two books by/ Marianne Moore" — is, though not by now unexpected, still one of the most powerful and sustaining elements of her poetic vision:

I go in search
 neither intense nor anxious
 but in observation of the small event . . .

These,
 events,
 these separate
 minutiae
 dot the horizon

like small birds flying south for winter
 leaving quick facts
 in my collection of unknowns,
 making the new familiar,
 and now intense.

(*Sunday Morning Walk*, 1956)

The same quiet insistence on the deceptively "small satisfactions" — "small joys and quiet ecstasies" — resounds in the 1962 volume, *The Sea Is Also A Garden*: "My cat is asleep under the tree./ She is a brief lyric/ of singing fur . . ./ To find some terrible meaning/ in this round space sleeping . . ./ would be, perhaps, to have struck/ God's thunder." And in the *Naked Poems* (1965), Miss Webb repeatedly strikes thunder out of the "brief lyric" and the sound is "terrible" because "unexpected" in so small a verbal unit which manages to be dramatic and narrative as well as lyric in its economic complexity.

I
 NTRODUCING THE "Naked Poems" (Suites I and II in the present volume) at a 1963 poetry reading in Edmonton, Miss Webb called them poems refined down to the "bone-essential statement." She said she was trying to establish "a kind of narrative line with a lyric intention". On the almost invisible "narrative line" she threads each "brief lyric" or "pearl poem" and in so doing

reveals her self-confessed debt to Sappho and the haiku, and perhaps an unconscious debt to Browning whose experiments with the dramatic lyric opened up the form and left it charged with a potential which twentieth-century poets have fully exploited. The elusive but essential “narrative line” with its “lyric intention” accounts for the careful arrangement of poems in the new volume, and suggests how the five sections are to be approached and read. “Suites I and II,” “A Suite of Lies” and “Some Final Questions” all have to be read *en suite*. It would be difficult to anthologize any single poem from a particular suite — for most obvious example, “*Oh?*” — and justify its autonomy or defend its meaning. But “Non Linear,” the central of the five sections, suggests that the eleven poems contained therein do not stand in line, even though they have in common certain thematic material (the creative and the love-making process). Each poem stands alone, just as the whole “Non Linear” section stands alone, flanked on both sides by two suites. It is the still and lyric point of the turning narrative world, “An instant of white roses” or an arrangement of “yellow chrysanthemums . . . a stillness/ in jade”, images and ideas which echo ideas and images in Eliot’s *Four Quartets*:

Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

Miss Webb’s movement towards the “still point”, the “intersection of the timeless/ With time”, the lyric with the narrative or dramatic, is clearly felt in poems like “Rust On An Anchor” which appears in the 1956 volume: “If to be remote/ (if only momentarily)/ as a Chinese poem/ Is to achieve sanity/ Then you and I/ like a Japanese ballet/ touch it as if/ Between the acts/ of a violent comedy: ? that is to say:/ Now and Then/ the rare mountain air/ is caught/ in a small/ Venetian glass bottle. . . .” The same movement manifests itself in *The Sea Is Also A Garden*. Poems like “Countered”, “Breaking”, “Making”, the “glass” poems, “A Tall Tale”, “Flux”, “To Nellie” and “Poetic Against The Angel of Death” announce in images that call on the tradition of mysticism and the apocalyptic, in allusions to the Buddha and St. John of the Cross, that Miss Webb’s vocation as Maker (“making/ certain order”) is comparable to what Eliot calls an “occupation for the saint” — namely, the attempt “to apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time.” “No occupation either, but something given/ And taken, in a lifetime’s death in love.”

“Who would call me to still centres/ needs a lesson in desire,” says the speaker in “Flux” (1962):

Who would kiss me on the mouth
 claiming me another self
 needs my body on their flesh
 tasting little bites of death,

death rerising in desire
 naming nothing but its hope,
 spiralling in calling flights
 flaming into nothing's throat.

Nothing finally is final —
 every love is a rain
 opening the bud to fire
 asking and receiving its own Easter.

The image of flux here is a fine example of purposive ambiguity, of Miss Webb's ability to pack *multum in parvo*. In Eliot's Heraclitean world, "Desire itself is movement," and opposed to the "still point" which is "inner freedom from the practical desire,/ The release from action and suffering." In Miss Webb's world of flux (where "Nothing" is substantively final, so that finally nothing can be called final), the desire to lead one's beloved to "still centres" needs to be instructed in the nature of desire: in other words, the desire for "inner freedom from the practical desire" leaves a lot to be desired, is desire which still has much to learn. In Miss Webb's vision of mutability, "love is a rain" (the "small" and "Western wind" variety) inspiring the bud to burst into flames (another kind of fire, another kind of "refiner's fire", like the "great rain" in Ezra, cataclysmic, destructive, death-dealing); death rerises, Phoenix-like, in the rain-refined fire or desire to love which asks and receives "its own Easter" (symbol of a "lifetime's death in love"); and the resurrection takes place at the "still point," "spiralling in calling flights/ flaming into nothing's throat" — and nothing, we know, can be called finally final. The lovely contrapuntal pattern by which Miss Webb makes "certain order", defines the indefinable but sharply felt "still point", discloses the timeless centre, or completes the perfect circle of her poetic vision, begins to emerge if we set beside the 1962 image of flux a sequence from the last suite of *Naked Poems*: "all my desire goes/ out of the impossibly/ beautiful // *But why don't you do something?*/ I am trying to write a poem // *Why?*/ Listen. If I have known beauty/ let's say I came to it/ asking // *Oh?*" Here the poet asks herself "Some Final Questions" and receives some answers ending in "Oh", in zero, in "Nothing" which is finally final because "every love is a rain/ opening

the bud to fire/ asking and receiving its own Easter." The last poem in *The Sea Is Also A Garden* ends with a single affirmation, "Yes!" The final question in *Naked Poems* is, though obviously ironic, equally positive since it implies another answer, as yet unspoken, from which the perpetual question will "rerise in desire" for yet another answer. The reader may be puzzled; some are even irritated by the enigmatic brevity of these poems, by the seeming emptiness of "Oh?" But Miss Webb confirms Rosamund Tuve's assertion that mature irony appears as "a courageous and thoughtful willingness to see all aspects of reality" by anticipating the reader's exasperated interrogation:

*I don't get it. Are you talking about
process and individuation. Or absolutes
whole numbers that sort of thing?*

Sardonically, the poet answers "Yeah."

Implicit in these poems from the final suite of the *Naked Poems* is the identification of two processes, love-making and poetry-making, both of which are seen as making a "certain order". In "Non Linear", this identification is explicit and many of the poems are "about" poetry and love-making. Using the sea, perhaps the most important single symbol throughout Miss Webb's work, as an image of *flux*, of perpetual *motion*, she writes: "I hear the waves . . ./ they are the root waves/ of the poem's meter/ the waves of the/ root poem's sex." *Root* means source, essential point or part, and one suspects that the "root poem" is for Miss Webb what "central poetry" is for Wallace Stevens. Writers of central poetry are "mystics to begin with. But all their desire and all their ambition is to press away from mysticism toward the ultimate good sense which we term civilization." Civilized "good sense" is an unmistakable element in Miss Webb's more mature poetry. What she says in "The Glass Castle" (1962) accurately describes all her major utterances: "I merely make a statement, judicious and polite." All the synonyms for "judicious and polite" — directed by sound judgment, wise, polished, refined and cultivated — can be applied without reservation to both Miss Webb's recent volumes. The "root poem", itself a sexual image, derives its basic nature, its sex, from the rise and fall, the love-making up and the breaking-down death of the wave which, while it appears to be in motion through time and space, is essentially still and so motionless. A "wave is a force and not the water of which it is composed, which is never the same," says Wallace Stevens, and he expresses the same thought in "Peter Quince at the Clavier":

The body dies; the body's beauty lives.
 So evenings die, in their green going,
 A wave interminably flowing.

PHYLLIS WEBB, in the *Naked Poems*, declares herself a daughter or an apostle of "the Priestess of Motion", of Flux, for which the "wave interminably flowing" is a perfect image. From the sea, which "is also a garden", the "mad gardener" (and "The lunatic, the lover, and the poet/ Are of imagination all compact") collects still moments, poems, "pale/ delicates at peace/ on this sand/ tracery of last night's/ tide." In "listening for/ the turn of the tide", she hears, is hounded and taken by "the wave of the/ root poem's sex":

Hieratic sounds emerge
 from the Priestess of
 Motion
 a new alphabet
 gasps for air.

We disappear in the musk of her coming.

The "brief lyric" cries uttered by the Priestess of Motion in her coming to a sexual-poetic climax in "the Act" of making love with the Logos, the godhead to whom she has dedicated herself, whose service is her vocation (an "occupation for the saint") — these are the "hieratic sounds", the cryptic letters of "a new alphabet" which "gasps for air" and is given room to breathe in the beautifully printed volume of her *Naked Poems* which was designed by Takao Tanabe.

This "new alphabet" with which Miss Webb spells out the language characteristic of her best poetry, can be seen in embryonic form in both her earlier volumes:

The slight touch
 and the words turn
 (the spelling of swift eyes) (1956)

The shape of prayer
 is like the shape of the small
 beach stone . . .
 curved and going nowhere, to fall
 in pure abstraction saying everything
 and saying nothing at all. (1956)

A smile shakes alphabets over my belly
and I bend down scrabbling "Yes" from a young Adam.
(1962)

In the *Naked Poems*, the new alphabet, taken like a rib from a young old Adam, becomes the "bone-essential statement" with which the poet chooses to work almost exclusively. And though some of the poems she makes out of it are longer than the lyric "Yes" in "I Can Call Nothing Love", all the poems in the latest collection are what she says they are, "hieratic sound", *hieratic* meaning (according to Webster) "an abridged and somewhat cursive form of hieroglyphic writing which in late use was reserved for religious writings," and which is therefore related to what Miss Webb calls the "shape of prayer".

THE "abridged and somewhat cursive form" of these new poems can, if we speak by analogy, certainly be called hieroglyphic:

brother and sister
conjunctive and
peaceable

Here, "conjunctive" and "peaceable" can be taken as adjectives qualifying "brother and sister". At the same time, the poem can be expanded (something like a telegram) to read, "Brother *and* sister: the simple statement of a relationship in which 'and' is conjunctive and expressive of the fact that the siblings are at peace." And if, as has been suggested, Miss Webb's attempt to create "a kind of narrative line with a lyric intention" is seen as her attempt to "apprehend/ The point of intersection of the timeless/ With time," to reach the still and "very center of consciousness" out of which comes Steven's "central poetry"; and if the dedication of oneself to such an attempt is an "occupation for the saint" or for the Priestess of Motion who makes out of the world of flux a "certain order" in the form of poems articulate with the "brevity of bone", then there is every justification for calling such writings "religious". They are religious in exactly the sense that James Joyce suggests when he speaks of the artist as "a priest of the eternal imagination, transmuted the daily bread of experience into the radiant body of everlasting life."

Nowhere does the "lyric intention" intersect the "narrative line" more dramatically than in the first two suites of the *Naked Poems*. Here, too, is the most

elaborate expression of what I have called the theme of “love *as* poetry”: a subtle metaphorical statement of the act of love as the act of imagination as the act of worship in which the beloved (who is the speaker in these poems) becomes the poet who becomes the Priestess of Motion whose “hieratic” utterances are the “brief lyrics” Miss Webb has written; and each “poem is the cry of its occasion/ Part of the res itself and not about it,” to quote Stevens again.

“Suite I” begins by making a room. The speaker is “enclosed/ by a thought and some *walls*”. There are “two flies/ on the *ceiling*”. She has thrown her “blouse on the *floor*”. At the *window*, “plum curtains”. There is a bed in the room, a “chair, a lamp, a/ fly two books by/ Marianne Moore”. And the room is in a house to which the speaker has recently moved, “Moving/ to establish distance/ between our houses.” Very quickly, at the end of the first poem, the room assumes meaning beyond that of a place in which to put furniture and live. After moving to establish distance, the speaker says:

It seems
I welcome you in.

Your mouth blesses me
all over.

There is room.

Room not only denotes the space contained within four walls, floor and ceiling, but also suggests the room which must be made for love to live in. Having separated, moved apart, the speaker has made room in which to be herself, living by herself, and room in which to love.

In the third poem, the room becomes an image for the body and the mind of the speaker: “Tonight/ quietness. In me/ and the room./ I am enclosed/ by a thought/ and some walls.” The image is a chinese box. The room contains the speaker’s body which contains her mind which contains her thoughts, her psyche or soul or whatever it is that constitutes who she is. Her self waits quietly enclosed by a thought as her body waits quietly enclosed by the room. When she speaks of peopling the room with things, the process is (by implication) repeated in her mind with thoughts, images, visions, poems:

While you were away

I held you like this
in my mind.

“Like this” seems to mean that she is now literally holding her lover in her arms in the room, and metaphorically in the poem, which holds the lover present in the mind, and the memory of the lover present in the room:

It is a good mind
that can embody
perfection with exactitude.

The room contains the body, the body the mind, the mind the poem, and the poem “perfection with exactitude.” It is the paradox of perfection *embodied* in the *mind* that enables the reader to catch the reciprocity of all these images: the room-body-mind welcomes the lover in, holds the lover in mind, embodies her so that lover, perfection and poem are superimposed and become synonymous. Hence the final poem of “Suite II”:

You brought me clarity.

Gift after gift
I wear.

Poems, naked,

in the sunlight

on the floor.

The “clarity” which the lover brings and the “perfection” with which she is synonymous, and which is embodied in the speaker’s mind, are clearly related. In fact, the clarity which enables the speaker to embody (or make poems) with exactitude is inspired by the perfection *embodied* in the poet, in the mind and in each poem, by the lover. They are indistinguishable. “Gift after gift/ I wear”—these lines refer back to the beginning: “Your mouth blesses me/ all over.” The kisses are blessings, are gifts, gift after gift: “And/ here/ and here and/ here/ and over and/ over your mouth.” “Again you have left/ your mark,” says the speaker in “The Bruise” (Suite I, poem 4). Bruises (“little bites of death” in “Flux”) and kisses, kisses and blessings, blessings and blouses, blouses and gifts, all these have the same essential meaning. “Gift after gift/ I wear./ Poems . . .”: the gifts are the poems inspired (i.e., made) by and embodying the perfection of love and love-maker. Because the gifts are also kisses, the poems are embodied in the kisses, or the kisses in the poems — “hieratic sounds”. The poems are “naked” like bodies

making love and, therefore, making poems. The poetry is in the love; the love is in the naked bodies; the naked poems and bodies are in the room; and all are enclosed by or held in the mind of the poet which embodies perfection with exactitude.

The poems are “naked,/ in the sunlight”:

The sun comes through
plum curtains.

I said
the sun is gold

in your eyes.

it isn't the sun
you said.

It is love and desire that are gold, like the sunlight, in the eyes of the lover (“Who would call me to still centres/ needs a lesson in desire”). Desire strips (down to the “bone-essential statement”) and leaves the poet whose mind embodies the poems “naked/ in the sunlight/ on the floor”. “I have thrown my/ blouse on the floor.” The speaker’s blouse is a gift from her lover: “On the floor your blouse”. And the light of desire in the eyes of the lover which, says the speaker, “took/ with so much/ gentleness/ my dark,” falls “more golden/ going down”. The images all relate with miraculous clarity and consistency. The lovers embody each other (that both are women is important and too obvious to need comment); they make love on the floor — “two flies/ on the ceiling/ are making love/ quietly. Or/ So it seems/ down here” — and in making love on the floor of the room, in which room is made for love and self-pity, the poems are made.

Lyric poetry is, more often than not, love poetry, and love is at once the most personal of all experiences yet the most common to all men and so the most universal. Miss Webb intensifies both the personal and non-personal aspects in her own poetry by setting her lyrics within the framework of an allusively suggested narrative, and by relating lyric moods, emotions, states of mind to a particular location.

Pearl poem
white with virtue
or opal
marred, shining

hold out for the moment
 when you'll be heard
 then speak
 from the absolute
 location
 of your mist

The paradox at the end of this unpublished poem describes exactly how the *Naked Poems* speak. The location and occasion (a room in which room is made for making love) are, like the speaker's mind, absolute and specific, they are so because clearly defined by the poet's "narrative line". But since the intention is lyrical, the poems are suffused with a universal mist which obscures the location of the location. A room, yes; a house, yes; but where, when? Fully realized, the lyric intention makes it impossible and irrelevant to answer these questions. The Priestess of Motion, in uttering her "hieratic sounds" (and read *en suite*, they constitute a formidable "lesson in desire"), succeeds in placing us at that intersection of narrative or historic time and lyric timelessness, and "We disappear in the musk" and in the mist "of her coming".

In poetry, as in all art, says Stevens, "the central problem is always the problem of reality." The poet whose poetry is "central" acknowledges "imagination as a power within him to have such insights into reality as will make it possible for him to be sufficient as a poet in the very centre of consciousness." In identifying this still point and very centre of consciousness with the sexual orgasm, and in writing "brief lyrics" the form and hieratic sound of which reflect the private and ephemeral nature of those "small joys and quiet ecstasies", Miss Webb offers an evaluation of her experience of life. If life has any value, it is to be found in love; if love has any meaning, it resides in its power to inspire the priestess of the eternal imagination to transmute the daily narrative of experience into a radiant body of timeless lyric poems.

THE WAY IT WAS

Ernest Buckler

D. O. Spettigue

CANADIAN LITERATURE seems to have come into existence at an opportune time for the student of English-Canadian prose. Two articles that have appeared in this quarterly, Warren Tallman's "Wolf in the Snow" and D. G. Jones' "The Sleeping Giant", have set a new standard of imaginative criticism of the novel. It may now be possible to examine the English-Canadian novel within a conceptual framework whose terms are supranational but whose application is readily adjusted to the national scene. Ernest Buckler is one author whose work lends itself to such treatment.

The two studies already mentioned show the influence of Northrop Frye and Roy Daniells. Roy Daniells has been foremost among those critics who have looked to the accidents of geography and climate for an explanation of certain characteristics of English-Canadian fiction. His assessment of the role of the "terrain", and Northrop Frye's identifying of fear and the "garrison mentality" as characteristic attitudes in our prose, are the more generalized precursors of the "Wolf in the Snow" and "Sleeping Giant" studies. W. R. Wilgar's "Poetry and the Divided Mind", to which Mr. Jones refers, is another parent of what may be called the "between two worlds" theme recognized by recent critics.

If it has been difficult in the past for critics to find a conceptual framework in which to treat English-Canadian fiction, that is partly because the writers have had such difficulty in finding a focus themselves. They have therefore tended to

look to the past for the illusions of unity or order, or abroad to greener pastures than a raw colony could offer. Among the early writers Major Richardson depicts British redcoats besieged in their forts in a wilderness connotative of fear. Mrs. Moodie, during the seven years in the bush clearing that she calls a "prison-house", looks to England as "home", but exhorts Canadians to work for their country's growth. Haliburton is another who contrasts the dismal present with what Maritime Canada could become. E. W. Thomson creates a Loyalist who, facing death by drowning, is content as long as he drowns on the Canadian side of the river. The inhabitants of Scott's Viger are trapped by their environment, but those in his northern tales are a part of the landscape. Modern English-Canadian writers renew the imagery of the threatening terrain, notably Sinclair Ross and Sheila Watson, but Malcolm Lowry finds in Canada both rest and inspiration, and Hugh MacLennan's Odyssean heroes, singing its vastness, seek themselves in seeking the source of its nationhood.

With nearly two centuries of fiction behind us, it is possible to identify somewhat more nearly than Mr. Jones has done, the Edenic image in our fiction as the environment of childhood or the immediate vanishing past, and to relate both Frye's "tone of deep terror in regard to nature" and Jones' Sleeping Giant to the perpetuation of the settler's response to the British North American terrain. The recurrent phrase, "the way it was", in Ernest Buckler's fiction is then relatable to the three fundamental attitudes to the Canadian environment, as *threat* (the wolf-in-the-snow or exiles-from-the-garden or drowned-poet or buried-life theme), as *haven* (the Canaan or New-World or Promised-Land theme) and as *potential* (the Adam-about-to-awake or child-of-nations-giant-limbed theme).

Ernest Buckler has been publishing fiction for some twenty-five years, but although he began his writing career with a prize-winning article and won the *Maclean's* fiction award in 1948, it was only with *The Mountain and the Valley* (1952) that he won critical attention. Again, he won the President's Medal for the best Canadian short story in both 1957 and 1958, but it was the publication in 1962 of the New Canadian Library edition of *The Mountain and the Valley* that won a wide audience for the retired philosopher of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia.

Writer of poetry, newsletters, articles, CBC scripts, novels and short stories, Buckler nevertheless has come to be known as the author of one novel. The phenomenon of the novelist who publishes one promising book and then sinks into silence, or who after many a summer publishes a second that does not seem to fulfil the promise of the first, is almost a Canadian tradition. It could therefore be predicted that Buckler's second novel, *The Cruellest Month* (1963), would

excite less comment than the first. It could also be predicted that the second novel would be less obviously confessional. But Buckler is already advanced in a third novel, and seems quite uninterested in conforming to expectation. One might even guess that he does not much care about the patterns of English-Canadian fiction. He knows what his fellows are doing but, like them, if he reads fiction at all it is likely to be contemporary American or European. It may then be asked whether there is any need to stress the Canadianism of an author who, unlike, say, Hugh MacLennan, does not take the national approach. The reply must be that there are distinct patterns in English-Canadian fiction which are just now coming to be recognized and that Buckler's fiction, which seems not only to conform to but almost to epitomize them, is worth studying as part of that context. A second reply is that, despite the obvious dangers and limitations of parochialism, it is no disadvantage, when judging the national product in the international arena, to know what the national product is.

“THE WAY IT WAS”, or “how it was”, occurs as commonly in Buckler's short stories and articles as in his novels. “How can you tell,” he asks in the reminiscent article “School and Me”, “such things as how it was the morning the mote-thickened spring sunshine slanted through the open window and you saw that the figure you were dividing with was the same figure in the denominator of the answer . . . ?” In “The Clumsy One”, a short story very close to the style of *The Mountain and the Valley*, the narrator broods: “I had the quicker way with the mind, and still I couldn't feel how it was with him, the way he seemed to know, with a quiet sensing, exactly how it was with me.” The story “The Quarrel”, which won the *Maclean's* prize for 1948, is built on a series of contrasts between the way a boy had expected the day of the fair to be, and the way it actually was: “That's exactly how it turned out to be. . . . You see, that was the August Sunday which was to have been twice as wonderful. . . . But it wasn't like other mornings. . . . We didn't keep saying what a perfect day it was. . . .” And at the climax: “Now here is where I wish for the subtlety to show you, by the light of some single penetrating phrase, how it was driving home. But I can only hope that you will know how it was, from some experience of your own that was sometime a little like it.”

Roy Daniells is one of many critics to comment on the prominence in English-Canadian prose fiction of reminiscence, especially of childhood scenes set on the

farm or in the village and attempting to capture the flavour of a way of life that can no longer be the way it was. The rural idyll of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was a sentimental development of that characteristic. Grove, Knister, Connor, Slater and W. O. Mitchell have exploited such material in sustained works, and it has been the staple of the short stories and sketches that make up so much of our prose tradition.

The Buckler short stories date from two *Esquire* publications of 1940-41, a promising year for Canadian fiction, though it must be admitted that the early stories showed little more than a facility with language. The published stories together seem to divide into four quite distinct groups. The *Saturday Night* group of the war years have a Sunday-school sentimentality about them, but introduce the concern with guilt, at any kind of separation or alienation, until separateness is resolved in a moment of transfiguring unity. The second group chronologically are the *Maclean's* stories of 1948 to 1951, which include Buckler's best: "Penny in the Dust", "The Quarrel", "The Clumsy One" and "The Rebellion of Young David". To these should be added "The Wild Goose" from the *Atlantic Advocate*, in which he has continued to publish to the present. These five stories are similar in style, theme and characterization to *The Mountain and the Valley* and might be considered exercises toward that novel, except that "The Rebellion of Young David" is incorporated in *The Cruellest Month*. The *Atlantic Advocate* group is generally less impressive but includes a number of stories exploring the personal and professional frustrations of the writer in his search for the unifying vision. These are suggestive of *The Cruellest Month* and again explore some of its specific complex relationships. Two stories from *Chatelaine* of 1956 and 1957 extend the *Mountain and the Valley* material. The remaining stories form a group of some range, from humour to thriller, but without much enlargement of the reader's experience.

Like the best of the stories, the two novels are set in the Annapolis Valley area of Nova Scotia. The principal difference between them is in range of characterization and time span. The first novel is a story of childhood and adolescence within a closely knit family group, but it is framed by a Prologue and an Epilogue set just before the protagonist's death, to which all the past has contributed. The action of the second novel occupies only a few days, with generous portions of flashback, but only the interpolated story reaches back into the rural past of *The Mountain and the Valley*. Like the novel, it is intensely involved in the complexities of hurting and healing in the context of love.

The representative Buckler activity is reminiscing, the area of reminiscence is

characteristically the childhood environment, and the emotions recurrently evoked are those of contrasting gloom and joy. The "it" of "the way it was" is the meanest of terms but on it is placed the burden of conveying the most transcendent experiences of unity in the fleeting moment. Against the memories of ecstatic experiences of wholeness are set those of separation, dissolution and alienation, and these are associated with guilt at the failure to seize the offered moment in which harmony might have been restored. The "was" of the phrase thus represents a complex of times in which the moment being lived by the character is contrasted with an ideal might-have-been which in turn is extracted from the recollection of an actual "was" of the character's past. That recalled moment (often the climax for which the suspenseful preparation is also given, as the days and hours leading to a child's Christmas) can only be rendered in terms of sense impressions — the way someone's face looked, what colour the leaves took in a certain light, how a voice would sound, the way the spring earth smelled, the feel of new skates, the warmth of familiar things — all intensely realized. At the same time, one is aware of an opposite impression, that these novels are remarkably abstract. Even in the sensuous *The Mountain and the Valley* the language may be that of the withdrawn intelligence extracting the essence of familial relations in analogies almost geometrically balanced. A balance in tension is created by comparing the present situation with a past or hypothetical situation which, if it obtained now, would reverse the present. But the perversities of human nature wilfully distort emotion, preventing communication, until just the right combination of sense impressions and circumstance bursts the floodgates of remorse and longing, restores unity and duplicates in the present the desirable emotion of the past.

This is a language of simile — not what *is*, but what it is *like*. The basis of the similes is the division of personality which can find analogies in two contrasting kinds of scenes, those of unity and those of discord. The basis of this division, in turn, is the divided personality, which has its counterpart in the divisions of the book.

The novel divides into six parts with Prologue and Epilogue, the eight parts tending to resolve themselves into two sequences. The first, the Prologue and Parts One to Three, are feminine in orientation; they are of the Valley. Parts Four to Six, the second sequence, are masculine; they align with the Epilogue, "The Mountain". In his Introduction to the New Canadian Library edition, Claude Bissell compares *The Mountain and the Valley* to "Fern Hill" as "a magnificent paean to the wonder and innocence of youth". The comparison is applied

to the first half of the book only, for “the very strength and sureness of Buckler’s treatment of the family . . . makes the last section of the book something of an anticlimax.” This is to overlook the structural unity of David’s struggle with time. The focus of the first half is forward: David’s responses to praise, to shame and to love, and his anticipation of the revenge or repayment or glory that he knows some day will be his. It is this sequence that has all the wonder, the enthusiasm and beauty of awakening youth. But the seeds of destruction are there. For all David’s love of family and farm home, he is an alien spirit. In a magnificently rendered scene at the centre of the novel, his frustration breaks out in a quarrel with his father. With the cruel desire to hurt and to escape, David provokes his father to a blow, then flees from home. But on the road to the city he is haunted and overwhelmed by the recalled faces of home, and he turns back.

He came to the bridge. He could see the house again. The ash of the quarrel, of blows given and felt, was tamped down physically into his flesh. The soreness was drawn out wire-thin, pendant at the corners of his lips. Suddenly he put his head into the only place left to hide: the crook of his elbow along the rail of the bridge. He began to sob. He sobbed because he could neither leave nor stay. He sobbed because he was neither one thing nor the other.

The chapter ends with his grandmother giving David the locket containing the photo of the sailor she once had hidden in the barn — symbol of the restless adventuring spirit she still supposes David will be. David is puzzled by the gift.

And then suddenly he knew where he’d seen a face like that. He was looking at it right there in the mirror. This locket had something to do with what had happened today. She’d sensed somehow what had happened. She’d sensed it because she too knew what it was like when the moonlight was on the fields when the hay was first cut and you stepped outside and it was lovely, but like a mocking . . . like everything was somewhere else.

He went to sleep at once, though. He was eighteen.

At this point David still is young enough to look forward to achievement and happiness. But by the end of Part Five, with Joseph’s death, the watershed has been crossed. Hereafter the bright moments will exist only in memory. “It would seem as if everything had gone by while he slept, down the road, and now he’d never catch up with it.”

In the second sequence the family unity that had provided the vitality begins to crumble; disintegration marks the central parts of the book, and thereafter the focus is backward as David declines into a defensive routine and withdraws even from the limited local society. This is the “buried life”, the “ritual death” from

which David must resurrect himself. The means to freedom is his discovery of his potential for writing. His childhood sensitivity to the familiar surroundings, and the anonymity that had enabled him to become the voice for others and release their tensions in ribaldry, now enable him to record with increasing precision "the way it is" at certain moments of the rural day. Like a new Adam, he will conquer his environment by naming it. The environment itself has thus changed from threat to potential, and now contains within itself the possible resolution of David's conflicting desires.

THE TITLE, *The Mountain and the Valley*, draws attention to the principal organizing device, the series of related, usually contrasting or complementary, symbols. The book is "about" the achieving of unity in an environment that does not seem to encourage unity — and thus the relation between Buckler and the Canadian prose tradition. The eight images named in the titles of the Prologue, Epilogue and the six Parts of the book are all indicative of the attempts, successful and unsuccessful, at reconciliation. "The Mountain" and "The Valley" make one complementary pair. They relate to certain characters and principles, as Mountain vs. Valley, Father vs. Mother, Male vs. Female, Toby vs. Anna, the tall pine vs. the house or, since the pine is to be the keel for a boat, the Ark (in Mr. Jones' terms) vs. the farm or garden. As in D. H. Lawrence, male and female are in opposition, antagonisms flaring or settling dully in at a word misinterpreted, a jealousy mistakenly aroused. Anna can find her fulfillment only through Toby, yet the two know very few moments of peace in their short life together. Chris, David's older brother (here, as in "The Clumsy One" and "The Wild Goose" the slow, inarticulate but intuitively knowing one, the one who belongs to the country) is forced by the demands of young sexuality into a marriage and a house where there is neither love nor understanding, where only separation can follow. David's early love is the pathetic Effie, a foil for the Anna David would marry were she not his sister. (Toby, whom she does marry, is virtually a double of David.) David tries to demonstrate a sexual prowess at Effie's expense and for Toby's benefit, but fails. Perhaps a kind of unity could be achieved in a sexual union wherein both accomplishment and security might be found, as in *The Cruellest Month*. But there is no such love outside his parents' marriage — this is precisely David's problem on one level. The climax of Part One is David's participation with Effie in a school play. Like a younger Stephen

Dedalus, he dreads and somewhat despises the gross event, but finds the play becoming a unity and achieving an effect beyond the worth of the parts or the players. This is the only promise David is given of a potential harmony that is not simply the effects of natural phenomena operating on youthful sensitivity. But a total unity is not achieved. David lacks Stephen's awareness of the distinction between the artifice and the fact; when he tries to kiss his startled princess and a coarse voice shouts applause, stepladder and Effie and illusion crash to the floor, and David flees. The play, first symbol in the first sequence, does not point the way to a resolution.

The second symbol, for which Part Two is named, is the Letter. Via a pen club, David makes contact with Toby who will become his only friend. That is, he has communicated with the outside world. Toby is a second David — in one scene David admires himself in Toby's sailor cap and realizes he could be Toby — just as both Toby and David are associated with the half-mythical sailor old Ellen had once hidden in her barn. He is the symbol of the restless spirit, the questing, moving male by contrast with the waiting female. After their marriage, Anna and Toby are separated most of the time, he away on naval duty, she awaiting his occasional returns. When he is lost at sea, she does not return to the farm. She has chosen the outside world and cannot go home again. Toby and Anna, then, are the questing side of David, and with their loss he is doomed to stagnate at home.

In the second sequence the equivalent communication to the Letter is the Train of Part Six. As so often in North American fiction, the train is the means to escape into the larger world — it has this role in Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* and *The Well*. In the last leave-taking with Toby, David goes to the front field to watch Toby wave from the train. Toby, absorbed in another world with other friends, does not even look. David goes berserk, hacking in impotent fury at the parsnips that are rooted like him, the half-self that will never enlarge itself again, "because all the crossroad junctions had been left irretrievably far behind."

Balancing Part One, the Play, is Part Five, the Scar. During the killing and scalding of a pig (another of Buckler's wonderfully exact scenes of farm life), David falls from a rafter and sustains a permanent injury and scar. Thereafter the pain is part of his consciousness, leaving him only in rare moments of renewed hope. The fall and scar would link David with the Adam and wounded god figures of mythology, while his weak heart makes his exile from the vital life a permanent condition, the state of man.

The Prologue and the Epilogue, entitled "The Rug" and "The Mountain", are the other complementary parts. Once David has discovered that he can write, his ingrown self can be freed into anonymity by becoming the myriad elements of its environment and then be expressed in words. Only then can the Sleeping Giant wake, the wounded god be resurrected, the Word recreate the Flesh. But mastery of words is a potential only. David's environment provides him with a stimulating flux; it does not provide the models of harmony that he needs for literary form, and his potential book is therefore never written. He is frustrated by sheer quantity of impression. The challenge his environment offers him is to create the intelligible order of literature from what might be called an "unintelligible landscape". He tries to acknowledge each component individually and of course is overwhelmed. What he lacks is the abstracting power of symbol, the kind of pattern his grandmother weaves out of experience.

The Epilogue continues the Prologue, both occurring in the same afternoon and developing the same few phrases. Here old Ellen has something of the role of Lily Briscoe of *To the Lighthouse*, her rug pattern developing parallel to the action and completing itself as the action is completed, so that one unity is accomplished, that of the family in the context of cyclical time. In the Prologue David stands at the window — a telling Canadian position — while behind him his grandmother selects her rags and weaves them into her rug. In the Epilogue David flees this house of death and bondage and climbs the mountain of his lifelong desire, while Ellen continues with her rug.

As he ascends, David goes through the nightmare of guilt at all the creation he has failed to name. No longer recalling, he is reliving all the significant moments of his past that cry out accusingly for expression. He is seeing, hearing, feeling not only the present sensations but all those of his past. Under the pressure of accumulated sensation David achieves a moment of mystical exaltation, "The complete translation to another time" which Buckler celebrates and represents. "It is not a *memory* of that time", for "the years between have been shed." The immediate becomes the past and "there is an original glow on the faces like on the objects of home." But David's exultation becomes horror as he tries to respond to all the demanding past in the present as well as the swarming present itself: "That little cloud that way and no other; that little cloud I didn't see, exactly the way *it was*", and so with the way everything has been and will be, and even might have been, all pursuing him "with the relentless challenge of exactly how each one was", until in horror he "put his arms about the great pine and thrust his forehead against its hard body", screaming "Stop". With this

strong masculine image his nightmare ceases. He has reached the top of the mountain and has ended his purgatory with the sudden conviction that he can *become* and thereby encompass and control all those demanding experiences. Adam will become his universe in naming it: "I know how it is with everything. I will put it down and they will see that I know." Then the blackness that is the outer border of Ellen's rug "swam in his head again", turns grey, then the white of the centre of her rug, and David, dead, is buried in snow. But the unity of mountain and valley is completed as a partridge flies from the mountain to the valley in a single direct movement that recalls the single brush stroke with which Lily Briscoe completed her painting and achieved the unity of the lighthouse. At this same moment Ellen has completed her rug and has shown her way to unity, as she sorts through the clothing of the living and the dead to weave into her rug. She lets selected objects include and stand for the multiplicity of associations as one coloured rag in her rug is both the focus of all associations of its relation to its onetime wearer, and also a part in the design of the rug that includes those associations but recreates them in a significant order. The concentric circles of coloured clothing in the rug expand from a point of white, as David's consciousness struggles against the nightmare of expanding detail, only to contract again sharply to the point of lace and the snowflakes which are, in terms of the novel, the achieved unity, and in terms of David's potential, the irony of another buried life.

David Canaan's literary family is a prominent one in English-Canadian fiction. There was the ancestral Mrs. Moodie at mid-century, warning that this land of promise was a "prison-house" for the educated until the prosaic arts of nation-building had been accomplished. There was Grove's Len Sterner at the turn of the century, still pioneering, frustrated and defeated by poverty because the physical accomplishment that would free the intellect from material necessity had still not been realized, perhaps could not be realized where nature without conspired with nature within to distract a youth from the very struggle it imposed upon him. There was Knister's Richard Milne carrying on a forlorn courtship with the ingrown spirit of rural Ontario, as David with the Annapolis Valley. But Richard had a road out; for David, the trains run everlastingly away. Among the moderns there is Robertson Davies' Monica Gall, who lacks even the awareness of potential until accident provides the money—the only gift of her environment—for an escape out of Canada and into fulfilment. Finally there is Sinclair Ross's Philip Bentley perpetuating the spirit of *Horizon* by preaching a creed he no longer believes in, until self-pity and the promptings of sex, sole agents of

revolt in such a climate, impel him to flee to the city, where a human community may be found sufficient to create the necessary illusion of stability. And then there is David, for whom the green and golden promise of the Annapolis Valley seen through the eyes of youth fades into the light not only of common day but of sterility absolute. Where Sinclair Ross achieves the effects of monotony in order to render the failure of creativity from lack of stimulation, Ernest Buckler achieves the effects of redundancy in order to render the failure of creativity from lack of focus.

LIKE MANY ANOTHER confessional writer of the modern mode, Mr. Buckler is concerned with the problems of the literary artist. He is one who can master words, who can bring to life the way an intense experience was; he has the language of the earth and the home, and the language of the flesh, as no other Canadian writer has them. And yet he distrusts words. He shows with surprising earnestness that distrust that is so profound in North American life — and that perhaps most definitely marks it off from Europe — of whatever savours too much of the study. This bias in Canadian fiction may help to account for its fondness for the pathos of the inarticulate victim, the stories of children and the animal story.

In *The Cruellest Month*, Letty is illiterate. In *The Mountain and the Valley* it is said of Chris that his thoughts were not “word-shaped”, though they were thoughts nonetheless, and one detects in David — perhaps in Buckler himself — that sense of guilt on the part of the very articulate person that an anti-intellectual society fosters, as though too great a facility with words implied a lightness of character; a kind of black magic clings to the rituals of words even yet. Inarticulateness is part of the simplicity of rural life; Joseph, Martha, Chris and Ellen are strong almost *because* their thoughts are not word-shaped.

In *The Mountain and the Valley* Buckler refers to the “original simplicity of rural people”. He contrasts it with the “artificial complexity” of city people, at least of those who have not gone beyond complexity to simplicity again. In *The Cruellest Month* he examines city people whose complexities are word-shaped, whose pastime is finding the words for their own emotions.

Formally, however, *The Cruellest Month* has a simpler structure than *The Mountain and the Valley*. Paul Creed has an old house in rural Nova Scotia; Kate Fennison, Morse Halliday, Rex and Sheila Giorno gather there for a spring-

and-summer retreat. (It has to be April for Wastelandic reasons, but one feels that this should be a summer holiday; the weather lacks the sheer miserableness of a Canadian spring, and the forest fire sequence, though made plausible, seems to fit a later season.) The other visitor is Bruce Mansfield, whose family once owned Paul's place. He works occasionally on Paul's land, and joins the group because of a sudden infatuation with Sheila. This is the familiar "frame-story" setting, or the pattern of a Shakespearean romantic comedy. The characters withdraw from society into a green world where old conventions are allowed to lapse, where new relationships are allowed to develop and the genius of the place so manipulates or simply permits the action that the characters return to their real world with a new knowledge of themselves as the curtain drops. In this case all the actors, obsessed by guilt and fear, have failed to fulfil themselves. But being sophisticates — a professor's daughter, a society girl and her husband, and a writer — they disguise their uncertainties under a varnish of words that is supposed to reveal them. Among these is set Bruce, whose condition of guilty withdrawal resembles theirs, but who is less wordy because he is native to the area; the enigmatic Paul whose few words are a more effective defence than their many words; and Letty, the middle-aged and illiterate housekeeper who knows "the months on the calendar . . . and the days of the week. And her own name . . . And Paul's. . . And the short words you lived by." Letty dotes on Paul, but has no part in his life with these sophisticates: "They were his kind. She is not."

But Letty is only partly right about this. Like David, Paul is between two worlds, the Annapolis Valley world and the distant city — it is the familiar Archibald Lampman position. But unlike David, Paul has known the city world. One of David's attributes was his capacity to live vicariously, to *know* "the way it was" with people and in situations he never had experienced himself. David can talk the city talk, but he feels the guilt of betrayal if he does so. When he says "It's immaterial" to Toby, he knows he has made a breach with his rural schoolmates that can never be healed; language becomes the stockade for a garrison of two. But Paul is a David who has "gone outside", has been a city sophisticate and now has returned to the home soil (as Buckler himself did in 1936). Here he can be one with the local people when he chooses, or can open his doors to city people at will.

The reader's attitude to Paul is likely to vacillate. Interpreted generously, he is sharing with a few of the world's misfits who can benefit by them the healing powers of Paul's place and of himself. But their adoration of him, which puts him beyond all criticism — he's the singiest damn person; you don't know any-

thing *about* Paul but you feel you know him — suggests that he is to be less a character than a manipulator, a Prospero whose detachment is almost too clinical. Paul's place is nicknamed Endlaw, not only as an anagram of the Walden it does not resemble but also as the place where the absurd rituals of social life are to be set aside (or replaced by other rituals). The name Paul Creed — it is almost too apostolic — may indicate a rooted faith or certainty by contrast with the creedless visitors who themselves have dubbed Endlaw "The Home for Incroyables", which may also suggest their unreality. Kate says of Endlaw: "You know time. Anywhere else, you hear its meter ticking whether you're using it or not. Here, that meter's stopped." Paul calls it "the one pocket of the universe that nothing could ever turn inside out", but this is also ironical, since Paul and his visitors are to be turned inside out before the novel ends.

Kate has been here before, with the father to whom she had devoted her life. On his death Kate, now a rootless spinster, flees the image of herself she sees being prepared in the faces around her. Morse has also been here before; his successful novel, significantly called *Each in His Narrow Cell*, was written at Endlaw. Now that his art and his life have staled, he returns in the hope of renewing the inspiration. The married pair are Sheila, society girl who has not yet told her husband that her family has lost its money and she is pregnant, and Rex, her poor-orphan spouse, whose good looks and naiveté have got him a war medal and Sheila and nothing else. The odd-man-out is Bruce, the disinherited Adam of this demi-paradise, and sometime medical student whose guilt at causing the death of his wife and son in a car accident has made him a recluse. In a kind of *Mid-Summer Night's Dream* the relations between characters are rearranged in spite of them. Bruce and Sheila fall in love and move inexorably to a sexual union before an accident returns them to their first loves. Kate, desperate to be fulfilled as a woman, allows herself to love Morse while uneasily aware that Paul is her soul-mate. Morse, thrice-married, accepts Kate in the expectation that she will be different, and that he can teach her to be a woman. The probability is that they will become another Sheila and Rex on a more rarified plane, the wife too readily seeing through, and less and less patiently condoning, the male posturing. And Paul, who loves Kate, so steels himself against that temptation that he is slow to see the alternative.

Fugitives from self-deception and social ritual, now they enmesh themselves in the rituals of their truth-and-consequences games which dare the participants to find the words for their secret selves. For Sheila, the most guarded, this is a temptation. For Kate it is part of the excitement she seeks; and for Morse, the cryptic

writer, it's all grist for the mill. For Paul it is perhaps the holiday stimulant he thinks he needs, since for all his easy intimacy he only "rents people", keeping himself and Endlaw inviolate through the other three seasons. The member of the party the others ignore as beneath them, Rex, must amuse himself at tinkering and target practice and blunderings in and out of the others' incomprehensible conversations. They treat him as a child — formally his is a counterpart to Bruce's son Peter — but he is also, Caliban-like, an unwitting agent of the action. The rifle he fires in practice later wounds him by accident after Sheila has told him of her wish for a divorce. The wounding, misinterpreted as attempted suicide, brings the remorseful Sheila back to him, so duplicating the success of his phoney war wound and freeing Bruce for a return to his medical training. At the end Sheila has accepted her lot with Rex, and Kate and Morse have gone off to be married.

But the projected holiday at Endlaw is cut short. After his guests arrive Paul secretly travels to Montreal for diagnosis of a heart condition. As in *The Mountain and the Valley* there is a watershed between the forward and the backward focus, so Paul's drive to the hospital, glossed over with clowning, is "the first high point in the arc of dissolution". The anchor in the others' lives, he now loses his certainty and feels the necessity to make "the definitive statement of himself. In one single sentence," which was the way of their game at Endlaw. Dismissing Kate and his other talkative friends, he determines to live his last seasons alone. Baffled and hurt they leave, but they complete the process of self-knowledge as they go. As unwitting agent, Rex causes a forest fire that threatens Endlaw just after the last visitors have left. Morse and Kate must drive through the fire and so endure a purgatorial ordeal which also faces Paul and Letty who battle the flames to the very edge of the house. When Paul collapses Letty learns of his illness, as he learns of his need of her. It is "not words" he wants, but the living flesh.

The controlling symbols of this novel are the fire, the gun and the wounding of the "king", the exile and quest of the characters, Endlaw itself, the opposition between the Word and the Flesh (the sophisticated talk vs. Letty's wonderful silent hands, Morse and Kate's tortured examination of the marital relation vs. the simple act of Paul and Letty), and Paul, whose heart condition is the tangible mark of time and whose self in retreat is the human condition.

Ernest Buckler is a novelist, not a romancer, and yet certain characteristics of the prose romance are discernible in *The Cruellest Month*. One is the convention, as old as the *Decameron*, of the withdrawal into a microcosmic world out of

society and out of time. Another is the use of such archetypes as the purging and refining fire and the sick heart. A third is the tendency of the characters to melt into one another, a characteristic of Buckler's fiction as a whole. Thus the short story "Doctor and Patient" plays ironically with a writer who feels he should have been a doctor and a doctor who should have been a writer. In *The Cruellest Month* Paul, anonymously undergoing examination in a Montreal hospital, adopts the name Bruce Halliday, from Bruce Mansfield and Morse Halliday. Bruce has been and will again be the doctor-in-training; Morse is the writer. Paul, who feels that the chosen name suits him, is another Buckler character who would like to be both. But in some sense he *is* both, and this accounts for his enigmatical anonymity. The element in him that would like to be savage author lives vicariously in Morse (who also is Kate's lover as Paul would be), as the element that would be first Adam in this garden of man is displaced in Bruce.

The range of style is greater in this novel. These are outside people coming to the Valley and being altered by it; those of the first novel were Valley people going from or staying in it. And these people are talkers, so that a conscious cleverness, like the conscious allusiveness, must be part of the style. If a language of abstraction was part of *The Mountain and the Valley*, it is more so here where abstraction is a way of life: "And for the moment they felt that curious disembodiment, almost to the point of seeing their own faces as physically pinched, which people whose chief alacrities reside in thought's analysis of feeling feel between peaks of engagement." Beside this language of analysis belongs that of the characters assessing themselves and one another, as in the anecdote of Paul and the bees. A third language is Paul's own calculated irreverence — that most essential creative gift — in balance with the reverence for the infinite variety of the familiar recurrent patterns of existence. This latter makes part of that language of reminiscence that dominates *The Mountain and the Valley*; the chapter that was published separately as "The Rebellion of Young David" is of that sort. The novelist's problem in introducing his characters is resolved here by a shifting of point of view. Part One begins with the characters gathered at Endlaw at the end of their first summer there. Part Two jumps five years to show them individually in the circumstances that will bring them back to Endlaw, and then another few days to show them arriving. The chapters of reminiscence serve to fill the five-year gap as well as to justify the characters as they are to be now. Thus Bruce's reminiscient chapter deals with his son Peter; in Part Two, in the present, Peter and Molly, Bruce's wife, are both dead.

Time and place make up the essential grid of Buckler's novels. Together with

the bridging of time goes the focussing of time by coincidental place, a device that recalls Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*. Bruce has returned to the family farm, now Endlaw, and is chopping wood there for Paul — symbolically he is defining boundaries. As each of the visitors approaches he hears or does not hear Bruce's axe, which thus serves to pinpoint place and time. It is also a device for irony, since the sound of the axe has a different meaning for each: Kate thinks it a happy sound, but Bruce is slashing at trees as David slashed at parsnips. Morse hears it and recalls boyhood in Minnesota. But, as in *The Mountain and the Valley*, it is not recall but reliving. Yet Morse's response includes the commentary that makes explicit the imagery of the fall from that state of innocence which axe and deer are to connote. (The deer appears later in the novel for both couples to see, with much the significance of Frost's "Two Look at Two".) The scene that Morse recalls resembles the mountain and orchard of *The Mountain and the Valley* and the imagery is just in its vein of multiple simile: "the axe more beautiful like swimming naked than the gun is beautiful like Christmas". Both the form of that equation — like himself, Buckler's characters have an eye for mathematical relations — and the choice of swimming naked and Christmas as criteria of the ecstatic moment are typical of Buckler's language of innocence. But the tree falls and Morse returns to the cynical author of the present: "and he's lost his clean beautiful axe somewhere . . . and his very breakfast food is shredded wit."

Here again the contrast is between a world of childhood which recurs now only fitfully to remind you of the way it was, and a present world which is a state of experience, of knowing. The criticism so often made of the younger generation — that it knows too much — is made by Buckler in "School and Me". It is an acknowledgement of the growing sophistication of an affluent society. But Grove made the same observation a generation earlier, and perhaps every generation makes it. The point is, for Canadian literature the here and now is the place of knowledge, and knowledge is the fruit of the archetypal fall. The person who knows can never be content with this environment, and can never escape it. One hears, in *The Cruellest Month*, echoes of *The Mountain and the Valley* in the images of the great good time and the great good place that were one's childhood in rural Canada — and one realizes that one is hearing them from generations of Canadian writers. In *The Mountain and the Valley* too there was a fall to mark the loss of that time and place, after which place becomes bondage and exile and time the one inexorable fact. Endlaw in *The Cruellest Month* is the place where, for a season, the garden seems to be regained, but where in fact man must labour

and must come again to knowledge. Those who return to the stream of time are returning to a slightly lower world, a world longer and farther exiled, but they return there renewed by their contact with the terrain and themselves. And Paul, who makes again David's choice for the Valley, choosing the female of the flesh and the familiar way it was, has only a wince for the female of knowledgeable word and the way it might have been:

She stressed it again. "Just as soon as you've *drank* your coffee . . ."

Paul winced.

And then he grinned.

For a moment the April morning seemed to preen itself in that faultlessness which so mocks the one alone. And in that moment they felt the one inimitable safety. That great, sweet, wonderful safety from the cry of things not understood, of things said and things not said, of things done and things not done, of what is near and what far-off, and the sound of time and the sound of time gone by . . .

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MAZO EXPLORED

Dorothy Livesay

RONALD HAMBLETON, *Mazo de la Roche of Jalna*. General Publishing. \$5.95.

RONALD HAMBLETON is a man hoist on his own petard. After spending some two years searching for the exact data on the Novelist Mazo de la Roche he has ignored exactitude on the periphery. There is carelessness in his supplementary material and in his bibliography. The excuse might be given that this is not a Ph.D. thesis, nor even a reporter's research; it is the result of a romantic affair! Who was Mazo de la Roche? Mr. Hambleton spent a year trying to interview her for the C.B.C.; and when he did so he was not satisfied. The real woman and her history, he felt, were carefully concealed behind the facade. For she was a successful (perhaps the only successful world-known Canadian) novelist, author of 23 novels published between the years 1923 and 1960. Further, she was a Canadian writer whose play, *Whiteoaks*, held the London stage for three years, had a successful North American run, and was made into a film.

Ronald Hambleton is to be commended for challenging the facade and especially for exposing the gaps in the author's own autobiography, *Ringing the Changes*. In that book there is not a single date! The reason why Mazo de la Roche was not anxious to make known

the exact details of her age probably lay in her pride: she did not publish her first book of fictional prose, *Explorers of the Dawn*, until 1922, when she was 43 years old. *Possession*, her first novel, appeared in 1923. What had happened in those early years of this century in which the unknown recluse was practising the art of fiction? Mr. Hambleton does not delve into this period at any length and it would seem, reading between the lines of her autobiography, that Mazo was a long time recuperating from a nervous breakdown which occurred at the turn of the century. Only when she and her parents, with the devoted "adopted" sister Caroline Clement, moved to a farm near Bronte, around 1911, did health and vigour return. Two of her most interesting realist novels came from that experience: *Possession* and *Delight*. Their style is that of an accomplished, practised writer. In delineation of character, evocation of setting, and in theme Mazo de la Roche knew perfectly what she was at. Her prose was strong, clear, fluent, pulled no punches.

Although Ronald Hambleton does not dwell on the stylistic or literary significance of Mazo de la Roche's work he does insist that Canadian critics have

grossly neglected her achievement; an achievement that began with *Possession* and continued through six more "key" books: *Delight*, *Jalna*, *Whiteoaks of Jalna*, *The Two Saplings*, *The Growth of a Man* and *Centennial at Jalna*. Thus, though in Canada and throughout the world Mazo is known largely as the creator of the *Whiteoaks*, only three of the seven books which Hambleton considers her finest are concerned with *Jalna*. If Mr. Hambleton has done nothing else he has directed critical attention to the variety and strength of Mazo de la Roche's output.

Two other aspects of the writer's work have been highlighted by this critical biography. First, the critic proves in a well-documented fashion that Mazo's writing was based not on an imaginary "country of the mind" as myth would have it, but on the social history of Ontario. This is "Whiteoak" country: that region centred in Newmarket, where she was baptized Mazo Roche in 1879 and whose radius extends from Lake Simcoe in the north to the southwestern shores of Lake Ontario, at Bronte. Canadian critics who have attempted to prove that the *Whiteoak* history and countryside was "not Canada at all" will have a harder row to pull now that the facts are set clearly in perspective. Mazo made unceasing use of her own family background of Ontario pioneers and Mr. Hambleton therefore stresses:

The life and lifework must therefore be considered side by side, for they are inseparable in the person to a degree not found even in the most autobiographical writer. In my opinion, Mazo de la Roche was being a novelist even when she was being autobiographical and to an even greater extent, was being frankly autobiographical when she seemed to be writing the purest fiction.

Because he sets out to prove this thesis it could be said that Mr. Hambleton's book suffers from lack of that clarity one hopes for in a straightforward chronological biography. Research data obtrudes too much, particularly in the rather tedious history of the \$10,000 Atlantic Monthly Award. Not always are the reader's interests kept in view and even the validity of the research may be questioned (as when the biographer gives me a grandfather named James Harris: pure guesswork, and quite wrong!). A point not followed up at all is the fact that H. R. MacMillan, the B.C. lumber magnate, was also born in Newmarket. He was Mazo's cousin and was the prototype for the hero of her novel *Growth of a Man*.

A third point which Mr. Hambleton sets out to prove is that Mazo de la Roche was "significant as the chief mourner of the dying English influence in Canada." He explores the theme by means of research into vital statistics, genealogy, visits to graveyards and personal interviews with friends and relatives (who were not too happy that a C.B.C. reporter unconnected with Mazo's life should be permitted to persist in his tabulations). Perhaps in his desire to leave no stone unturned Mr. Hambleton has been too assiduous: statistics become tedious, repetition boring. But the account of Mazo's pioneer forebears is well worth reading and so also is the moving account of Mazo's life with her sister-cousin, Caroline Clement. He does justice to the role played by Miss Clement not as actual co-creator of the novels, but as an indefatigable supporter and critic. What emerges is a portrait of two devoted women, foils for each other, dynamic in their energy and imagination,

loyal in their friendships. Some delightful photographs add force and verve to the narrative.

The true work of criticism of Mazo de la Roche as Canada's most prolific and certainly most fascinating novelist has yet

to be done. Ronald Hambleton in his labour of love has laid out the way for those younger critics who will, it is to be hoped, approach the problem afresh. An imaginative, perceptive appraisal is now essential.

FIRST AND LAST THINGS

Hugo McPherson

GABRIELLE ROY, *The Road Past Altamont*. McClelland & Stewart. Cloth, \$5.00; paper, \$2.50.

AT THE CLOSE of *A la recherche du temps perdu* Marcel Proust thinks of age as a pair of stilts which grow until their wearer, tottering precariously, suddenly falls; his own stilts are already tall, but he must cling to them until he can recover in artistic form the meaning of his past. In *The Road Past Altamont* Gabrielle Roy's young heroine wears stilts despite a delicate "heart" in an effort to see farther across the flat prairie of her world. Miss Roy's use of the stilts image may have nothing to do with Proust, but as in his multi-volume novel, the linked tales of her new book are an evocation of the past, an attempt to release from four outwardly unremarkable experiences the mystery of first and last things.

Readers who are intent on the latest developments of pop style, mosaic narrative, and endocrine incident, may mistake the pellucid simplicity of these new recollections of Christine, "Petite Misère" (the narrator of *Street of Riches*), for mere ingenuousness and dismiss them altogether. For there is none of the astringent social documentation of *The Tin Flute* in this book, and none of the

quaintness of anecdote and character that give *Street of Riches* its special warmth. Instead, the adult Christine might be obeying an Eliotian command to "descend deeper" into the meaning of her youthful experience. The resulting tales have an oblique and delicate stillness that goes beyond introspection; they are, in a deep sense, meditations.

In the first tale, "My Almighty Grandmother", Christine is six years old. On a summer visit to her formidable Mémère she is suddenly overwhelmed with *ennui* — not "boredom" as in the translation — but an inexplicable, lonely, and melancholy dullness. When the usual bribes of food and diversion fail, Mémère enchants her by making and dressing a doll. Christine breaks into joyful tears: "You're just like God. You can make things out of nothing as he does." But Mémère, already in failing health, denies such power. Later on she comes to live with Christine's Maman, and as her faculties and senses gradually desert her she comes to know a terrible isolation and *ennui* of her own. Now nothing satisfies, until one day, with childish in-

tuition, Christine brings out the family album, names for Mémère the names of "all those who belonged to her," and reminds her simply: "You were beautiful in those days." For the remembering narrator these recovered moments of "play" become resonant with meaning; unconsciously, that long-ago Petite Misère had begun to understand the delight of creation and the ineluctable taxes of time.

The stories that follow produce similar moments of illumination for both narrator and reader. Christine's next companion is Monsieur St. Hilaire, an eighty-four-year-old gentleman who takes her away from the sweltering heat of the city for a day at Lake Winnipeg. She regards this new friend as an oracle who can answer her most difficult questions. Together they press on past the noise and turmoil of the Winnipeg Beach fun-fair and spend their day beside the ageless lake, watching her many moods, and pondering over the past, the beckoning future, exploration, and death. M. St. Hilaire remarks that "it's always rather solemn beside the water when evening comes," and Christine senses that the end of his life may be near at hand. But death, she learns, is natural—a necessary discovery; for young travellers, however, the "greatest discovery" is love, "for the country of love was the most vast and profound there was." At home again, Christine cannot express her new awareness her day has brought; she can only cry raptly, "I've seen it, Maman!... Beautiful Lake Winnipeg!"

The remaining tales, "The Move," and "The Road Past Altamont," confirm and elaborate what we now recognize as Miss Roy's presiding metaphor: life is a simultaneously exhilarating and painful process of voyaging, for the present is

never enough. What Maman calls "tragic desires for perfection" impel us—often recklessly—into the future, and deepening insight or regrets send us back to re-discover a past that we have understood very imperfectly. Maman thinks of exploration as the "family disease" and wishes an end to departures; but the disease leads to its own remedy—the "great discovery" of love and belonging.

Stated directly, this metaphor sounds platitudinous, but Miss Roy gives it a resonance that expands in both time and space to include the vision of La Vérendrye and the over-idealistic dream of the Highlanders who settled in Altamont; giddy young people's motor car rides and Christine's arduous progress on stilts; Maman's memories of the covered wagon trek and her longing to rediscover Quebec hills in the Altamont landscape; the pathetic move of the Smiths from one hideous urban fringe to another still more ugly; and Christine's voyages into the self and out to the great world of Europe. In form the book is a musical suite which serves as a calm resolution to many of the themes that informed Miss Roy's earlier novels and stories.

It may be that one or two of these tales are too fragile to bear the weight of meaning with which Miss Roy invests them, but they reveal a sensibility of great depth and a mature artistic control. The difficult narrative method, blending the child's innocent perception with the narrator's mature insight, is superbly handled, and the moments of intense emotion are never coy or sentimental. In my judgment, indeed, the first two tales must be recognized as small masterpieces. Christine's *temps perdu* has been recovered in enduring works of art.

HUGO MCPHERSON

CANADIAN PAINTERS

George Woodcock

J. RUSSELL HARPER, *Painting in Canada: A History*. University of Toronto Press.
\$20.00.

KATHLEEN DALY PEPPER, *Morrice*. Clarke Irwin. \$4.50.

IN HIS "CONCLUSION" to the *Literary History of Canada* Northrop Frye suggests that, now a definite record of Canadian writers and writing has been completed, the time has perhaps come to think of preparing an evaluative "Literary Criticism of Canada". In making this suggestion he was obviously moved by the feeling of frieze-like flatness inevitably created by the comprehensive narrative account of the progress of any art. In such accounts one misses the *chiaroscuro* of good comparative criticism; the high lights never shine brightly enough on the heroes because the dim chorus of those who are usually forgotten must be given its due illumination.

Yet the *Literary History of Canada* was, despite its faults, a notable and necessary achievement, and it is with the same qualified admiration that one approaches the book which will certainly balance it as the definitive survey of the painting of our land. J. Russell Harper's *Painting in Canada*, which has been supported from the stage of research to that of production by the Canada Council, is in one respect greatly superior to the *Literary History*. It is written by a single hand, and its author sustains a level of scholarship and of narrative clarity which the earlier work lacked owing to the great variety of competence and eloquence on the part of its many authors.

At the same time Mr. Harper's con-

scientiousness in giving some kind of particular attention to every painter of even minor standing in the earlier, sparser periods has resulted in a distortion which makes the distant loom too large and the near too small. Good painters were as rare in Canada as good writers until the 1890's, when the harbingers of a mature tradition appeared in the cosmopolitan James Wilson Morrice and the Quebec recluse Ozias Leduc, both of whom were remarkable artists by any standards, and both of whom, by their pursuit of aesthetic rather than quasi-literary goals, followed the kind of exemplary careers which helped to free artists from obedience to the demands of an art market dominated by the didactic values of the Victorian age. Yet more than half of Mr. Harper's narrative has gone by, largely in the consideration of eighteenth and nineteenth century artistic nonentities, before he reaches either Morrice or Leduc. Even his consideration of the twentieth century is marred by the fact that too much space is given to the anecdotal history of the Group of Seven — though here credit must indeed be given to Mr. Harper for stressing the negative as well as the beneficial influence of the Group, whose members, like the leaders of political revolutions, lived on to create their own reaction. The result of this approach is that the vital and excitingly experimental post-war period from 1945 to the

present is given a mere 32 pages in a volume of 414 pages, and many interesting contemporary painters, particularly in Western Canada, are either ignored completely or merely listed. Why, one wonders, are independent-minded swimmers against the currents like Alistair Bell and Joe Plaskett not even mentioned in the discussion of recent trends in figurative work? Why are Molly Bobak and John Korner no more than casually-dropped names? Why does Ed Hughes, whose career is far from ended, appear merely as a war artist twenty years ago?

It would be unfair to add to this criticism of the content of *A History of Painting* the complaint that Mr. Harper mainly avoids evaluation. True, he himself deplores the lack of real art criticism in Canada:

Newspapers and magazines today carry innumerable reviews of exhibitions, but as in the past only a small percentage reach the level of critical writing. There is no authoritative Canadian observer of the contemporary scene who commands a truly wide national following among artists and laymen. There has been as yet no Canadian theoretical writing on art.

But he does little to fill in the void, and, indeed, this can hardly be asked of the historian whose prime task is to cover so wide a historical panorama as that which extends over the vast range of time and changing artistic values from early New France to the Canada of the 1960's. What he does present, particularly for the generations before our own, is a magnificent chart on which painters are carefully placed and over which the interplay between artistic movements and social-national circumstances is equally carefully traced. "Jacques de Tonnancour," Mr. Harper tells us, "has remarked that what Quebec Province needed was a

vigorous blow from the outside to break the lethargy which had existed for years." Almost the whole history of Canadian painting, as here presented, seems like a series of "blows from outside," some fair, some foul. Mr. Harper pays no direct attention, for example, to the indigenous tradition of painting among the Pacific Coast Indians. From the beginning he is talking of types of painting that originated in Europe, and the nineteenth century has almost reached noontide in his narrative before Canadian circumstances influence the imported arts sufficiently to show characteristically Canadian mutations, appearing first in Quebec with paintings like Joseph Legaré's magnificently proto-Surrealist ruinscape of the fire in the Faubourg St. Roch (1863), and not long after in the west with Paul Kane plumbing native subject matter more deeply and more dramatically than Krieghoff, with Adolphe Vogt and Daniel Fowler beginning to trap the real Canadian light on canvas and paper in the 1870's, and in the 1890's with the mature work of Homer Watson (whose talent Oscar Wilde had perspicaciously recognized a decade before), which, in tense, simplified oil sketches like "The Gravel Pit", for the first time sees "the Canadian landscape as Canada."

Yet even these painters derived from European traditions, and Canadian painting was constantly renewed by the arrival of artists taught in Britain and France and occasionally influenced by the Orient. Sometimes these immigrations had curious artistic results, such as William G. R. Hind's pre-Raphaelite watercolours of Cariboo miners looking like the heroes of William Morris sagas, and the intriguing early Japonoiseries of Edward M. Richardson's sketches of Victoria in the 1860's.

The worst painters remained the slaves of London and Paris academicism; the best transmuted their influences, though the imported strains are rarely far below the surface (for example, the strong Art Nouveau and Impressionist elements in the work of the Group of Seven). As time went on the "blows from outside", though they continued, were manifested in a different way. From being colonial, the end of the road for imperial art movements, Canada became cosmopolitan, its painters — or the more restless of them — forming part of the international artistic community which has grown up world-wide since 1945; movements, theories, even minor gimmicks, have only to gain notoriety in New York for them to be imitated in Toronto and Vancouver, to the amusement of the rank-and-file painters and to the rare benefit of the

genius who — like Borduas or Riopelle — can on occasion make gold out of any dross.

Painting in Canada is the kind of book which enables readers to trace heritages and developments of this kind with relative ease, and which also shows them how elusive — though it may be real enough — is the breath that can be called Canadian in Canadian art. The Group of Seven had it and almost lost it by becoming self-consciously nationalist; others, like Pellan and Shadbolt, have kept it, paradoxically, only by immersion in the alien element of periodic exile.

In a history of art, illustrations are as important as text, and those in *Painting in Canada* — almost four hundred of them — are carefully chosen, so that they do provide a comprehensive visual narrative paralleling that in writing. Here, the

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BY GEORGE WOODCOCK

A well-known writer and lecturer examines the man, the novelist, the patriot, the stylist, in this absorbing and expansive study of the famous author of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. George Woodcock knew Orwell in England; he has made no effort to produce a biography, "partly because Orwell specifically wished that no such book should be written, and partly because I may well stand too near the subject to attain the objectivity such a work would demand." What Woodcock has created is an endlessly fascinating study of a brilliant and complex personality. \$10.00

CLARKE IRWIN TORONTO VANCOUVER

form of his book has enabled Mr. Harper to bring out of the recesses of history and give us at least a flavour of the work of interesting and individual artists whom we might otherwise forget, such as Thomas Davies, the charmingly Rousseauish topographer and water colourist who came to Canada in the late eighteenth century, and Father Arthur Guindon who, in the early twentieth century, before the Surrealist movement had been heard of, developed his own Surrealist style of painting, influenced by Hieronymus Bosch. Such an excellent collection of visual material makes it all the more regrettable that the colour plates badly distort both the tints and tones of the original works.

As a history, *Painting in Canada* is so comprehensive and scholarly that it is unlikely to be superseded for many years, but it leaves one awaiting its critical companion, and at present, in the dearth of good Canadian art criticism, one is at a loss to think who might write it.

Certainly the writer who tackles such a task will need a much sharper, more analytical view than that displayed in Kathleen Daly Pepper's little book of biography-cum-exposition, *James Wilson Morrice*. Mrs. Pepper is not lacking in anecdotes of Morrice, whose life lent itself to such treatment, and she devotes many pages to recreating the scenes of his upbringing and of his painting career. But though, in occasional flashes, she does bring alive the man and even his setting, it is clear that the romantic vision of the artist's vocation is more easy for her to develop than any serious discussion of Morrice's actual works. Yet Morrice's whole life as a painter was dominated by the view that aesthetic values were the only important ones in an artist's life. In this respect Donald Buchanan's study, written twenty years ago, is much superior to Mrs. Pepper's volume, and remains the best account of this "artist with the delicate vision", as Matisse once called James Wilson Morrice.

THE GOLDEYE SWIM

Marya Fiamengo

MIRIAM WADDINGTON, *The Glass Trumpet*. Oxford University Press. \$4.50.

THE OPENING POEM of Miriam Waddington's new collection, *The Glass Trumpet*, gives clear expression to the polarities of her poetic work. "Things of the World", the title of both the poem and the opening section, is in itself significant, for Mrs. Waddington writes both of the world and the private self. She juxtaposes, in a series of remarkably as-

sured, mature and finely crafted lyrics, the introspective imaginative self against the tangible external realities of urban living: ("A Song of North York Between Sheppard and Finch"); the city as fact ("Returning to Toronto"); and the city as dream, ("The Far City", "Toronto the Golden Vaulted City").

"Things of the World" is an accurate

and delicate microcosm of Mrs. Waddington's major themes and pre-occupations. The poetic persona, a "north Winnipeg girl/bending over water", spends her summers at a lake and watches the goldeye swim but "Later in the neon season/of an eastern city", she eats "its white flesh" remembering how once long ago she was converted

to a blazing innocence
easy to learn but the other
things that harmed her
(even herself) those
she could never explain

The entire volume could be said to ring a series of variations on these lines. The indestructability of nature synonymous with innocence, the sustaining power of the creative imagination represented by the goldeye whose flesh is later eaten in the synthetic non-poetic neon reality of an eastern city, the inevitable encounter with pain and the recognition of suffering and evil as part of the schema of things, are all there.

The one crucial aspect of experience central to much of Miriam Waddington's verse, sexual love or passion, is not present in these lines. Since this particular poem is an evocation of the poet's early girlhood and innocence the theme of sexual love must wait.

What gives *The Glass Trumpet* its unique and distinctive quality, however, is the very power and conviction of the poems dealing with the passionate experience of love. Like the power of the mind to create art, human love arising out of sexual love is seen by Mrs. Waddington as a liberating and redemptive force in human affairs.

Those rare moments, the experience of human intimacy, are like a "lost and broken beauty", "a speechless love", and



*Like an old, nervous and
eager cow
my country
is being led up to the bull
of history . . .*

*Certainly it will be the
biggest
bang-up affair
within the memory of
centenarians,
and seismologists have
been alerted
everywhere
to record the shocks and
tremors . . .*

*For everyone coming to
watch
this extraordinary event
there can be
standing room only
for himself
and a single bag of
overcharged peanuts . . .*

These are a few lines from
Irving Layton's immortal
Confederation Ode,
one of many fiery poems
in

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the return to the isolation of the self after consummation and communion remains in the mind like "Pictures that tremble and change/like what is left over /after a visit to a breathtaking exhibition /in the museum of a foreign country".

Mrs. Waddington writes her love poems with a supreme honesty, an illuminating candour whose very unself-consciousness makes her among the most direct and most purely lyrical poets of love writing in this country. In this genre she bears comparison with few; Irving Layton perhaps, at his best, or Leonard Cohen. The latter is too often deflected into eroticism which is another species of experience again. What distinguishes Mrs. Waddington's love poetry and sets it apart, makes it peculiarly her own, is a kind of amplitude of response, a range as well as depth and intensity of feeling. It is a highly individual combination of a proud and precise awareness of the implication of loss which sustains personal dignity and yet supports a full and generous commitment to the other, the beloved.

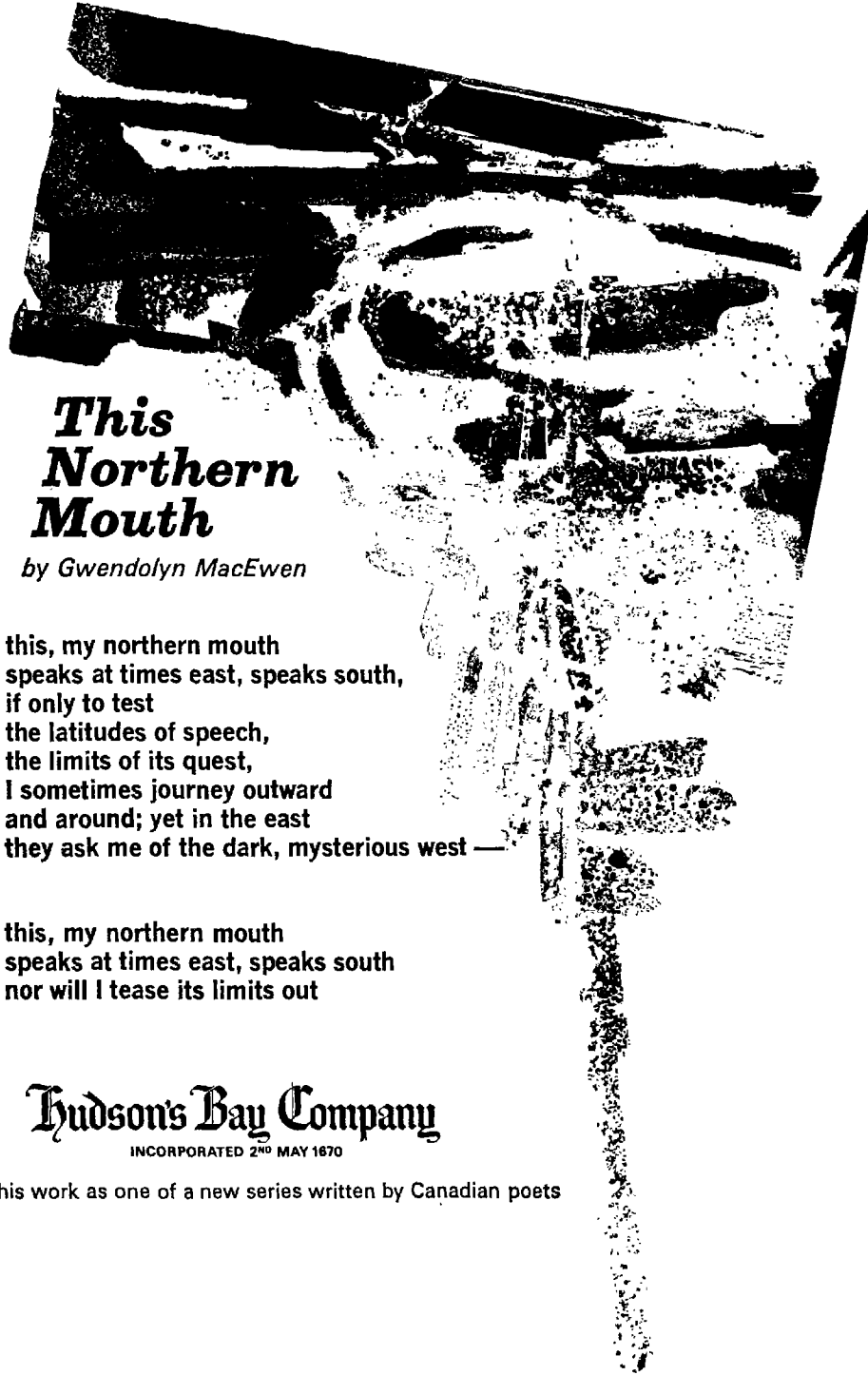
Miriam Waddington's poems have been criticized in the past for either a lack of intellectual structure or for a reliance on metaphysical ingenuities which impose a forced and artificial structure on her work. At this point it may be valuable to say something about the purely lyrical sensibility. The contemporary poetic idiom is not an overwhelmingly lyrical one and the poet with a predominantly lyric bent finds himself compelled by the prevailing *geist* to weight and encumber his work with poems of a more cerebral cast. Mrs. Waddington has resisted that temptation admirably. The present volume is remarkably free of intellectual affectations of any kind. "The Journeying" and "Lev-

elling" show some small signs of strain, a sense of tour de force not present in the formal ease of "Winter One".

Concerned as she is with the projection of an essentially lyrical response to experience, Mrs. Waddington's art relies mainly on those heightened moments of insight and awareness which must be clearly delineated and exactly articulated in the poem. This necessitates above all a controlled intensity. The poet as maker must walk a taut rope of imagery and rhythm to form the hard crystal surface of the poem. Occasionally, Mrs. Waddington's language and form drop into a low keyed discursiveness that is either description or commentary and that lacks the essential tension of poetry. "Summer Letters" is such a poem, "right here on/Mutual Street but/he's lucky these/ruins are all/num-/bered —". There is a kind of ruminative verbal leisure here, a slackness of language that the arbitrary line breaks do not redeem.

At her almost constant best, Miriam Waddington, although she may stray into dexterities of language reminiscent of E. E. Cummings as in the "you are my me and my how my pray and also prithe" of the "Mile Runner", is a poet whose direct, vivid observation finds expression in effortless felicity of metaphor and simile as in the "bending /beside the sea thin /as a cardboard cutout" of "The Oracle" or the "kindergarten children weightless as scattered leaves" of "Committee Work".

Perhaps the most arresting poems in *The Glass Trumpet* are those in which the poet explores personal identity in richly allusive terms. The ability to fuse the myth of the individual self with the impersonal archetypal self is seen in the haunting, evocative "Sea Bells"



This Northern Mouth

by Gwendolyn MacEwen

this, my northern mouth
speaks at times east, speaks south,
if only to test
the latitudes of speech,
the limits of its quest,
I sometimes journey outward
and around; yet in the east
they ask me of the dark, mysterious west —

this, my northern mouth
speaks at times east, speaks south
nor will I tease its limits out

Hudson's Bay Company

INCORPORATED 2ND MAY 1670

presents this work as one of a new series written by Canadian poets

Oh daughter toll the sea-green bell
and shake the coral from your hair,
the sea was once your bed of birth,
your given name your knell.

If my spirit should yearn
for one whose absence I forgave,
raise a golden bough to burn
above my lighted grave.

The "Sea Bells" and a number of poems also dealing with the poet's specific cultural links with her Jewish-Slavic past and the relationship of Jewish-Slavic father and Canadian daughter are compellingly moving as is the effective final poem, "The Snows of William Blake".

The Glass Trumpet emerges as a collection of poems which testifies to an ardent imagination at once intelligent, compassionate, and warmly human. Miriam Waddington's mind and craft speak to us of "our blind sick- / ness healed" and her poetry does indeed "hold us open-eyed in pure transparency".

THE CARDINAL'S BIER

Wayne Burns

WILLIAM ROBBINS, *The Newman Brothers*. Bellhaven House. \$6.75.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to *The Newman Brothers: An Essay in Comparative Biography* Professor Robbins has stated clearly what his book is and is not intended to be. "The Newman scholar," he explains, "will find little to add to his specialized knowledge in these pages; the philosopher and historian will find no challenging reconstruction. But the student of the period and the general reader may, I hope, share my interest in two brothers whose search for religious truth drove them far apart, in spite of a common devotion to spiritual values, and whose response to the claims of the seen and unseen world was such as to reveal in them perennially different types of humanity."

Robbins' "hope" that the general reader may share his interest in the elder of the two brothers is, to say the least, super-

erogatory. The story of John Henry Newman's search for religious truth — as he moved from Evangelism, through Tractarianism, to Roman Catholicism — has fascinated general readers (as well as scholars) for over a century now. And books on Newman continue to appear, books of attack and defense, books designed, in Robbins' own words, "to show 'the mystery of Newman', or to deny that there was any mystery."

In his own summary account of John Henry Newman, Robbins manages to reconsider the more significant aspects of this mystery: to show, for example, that "the extremes of self-absorption and aggressiveness are there at all times" in Newman; that they are, in large measure, the result of his "repression of the natural man." And Robbins is equally straightforward in treating "the references to

Newman as having almost a feminine charm. 'His friends,' says Wilfred Ward, 'loved his very faults as one may love those of a fascinating woman.' Robbins then points out how these and other references (e.g. Newman's "early dedication to celibacy and the ideal of virginity . . . his annoyance at the marriage of disciples") lend themselves to Geoffrey Faber's suggestion in *The Oxford Apostles* that there is "A homosexual strain in Tractarian friendships." And Robbins himself notes the connection between a passage in Newman's semi-autobiographical novel of 1848, *Loss and Gain* (in which a potential convert expresses his repugnance for the physical aspect of marriage) and Newman's own response to the marriage of young Henry Wilberforce, when that young man was actually "afraid to tell Newman of his fall from grace."

Further than this, however, Robbins cannot or will not venture: "One falls back again," he concludes, "on the term 'complexity.' There is no doubting the richness of and depth of Newman's friendships, but psychological speculation on their nature and quality can evoke as violent disagreement as opinions of his mind, his character, his very manner and appearance." What Robbins seems to be saying is that the biographer should not follow out the implications of his psychological speculations (or for that matter any other type of speculations) when those speculations evoke violent disagreement; that he should, instead, fall back on the term "complexity", or some other form of evasion about which there can be no violent disagreement. But whether or not this is what Robbins means, it is what he too often does. And his inclinations to "fall back" is all the more regret-

table because it prevents his portrait of Newman from being much more than a composite reproduction of previous portraits.

Of course it can be argued that I am being unfair, that I am asking too much of a 185-page book when not more than half those pages are devoted to John Henry Newman. But to defend the book in this way is to raise the question as to whether or not Robbins should have tried to put both Newman and his younger brother in a book that is not really big enough to hold either one of them.

In any event Robbins' treatment of Francis William Newman is both interesting and illuminating—in part because Francis himself is such an interesting man and brother and thinker. Of his many books the best known in his own time were *The Soul* (1849) and *Phases of Faith* (1850), both of which ran to nine editions by 1874. Less successful, but equally representative of his varied interests and changing views are such books and articles as *An Appeal to the Middle Classes* (1848), "The Ethics of War" (1860), *The Defective Morality of the New Testament* (1866), "Marriage Laws" (1867), *The Bigot and the Sceptic* (1869) and "Vegetarianism" (1875).

At Oxford Francis (who came to be known as Frank) took a double-first; then, although he could not subscribe to the Thirty-nine Articles, he became a curate, went to Ireland, spent two years as a missionary in Syria and Persia, held professorships (of Classics) at the University of London and Manchester University, and supported all sorts of liberal and rationalistic and humanitarian causes. For while he had begun, like John, as an Evangelical, he started moving towards moral theism at about the same time

John began moving towards Catholicism; and Frank's soul-searchings (as he groped his way towards what John had declared an impossible position: "a halfway house between Catholicism and Atheism") are every bit as interesting as John's. It took him half a century but in the end he rejected "mystery in religion . . . the resurrection . . . belief in immortality of any kind . . . [and] from his early attacks on the Scriptures as incredible historically . . . [he] passed to an attack on them as unedifying morally". What, in his own words, could be done with "the incoherent, hyperbolic, enigmatic, fragments of discourses given to us unauthoritatively as teachings of Jesus?" Robbins is at his best in presenting Frank's criticism of traditional theology. Indeed Robbins' treatment of Frank's moral theism is altogether quite masterful, especially in the way it brings out the intellectual and religious implications of Frank's long Quixotic journey through the maze of nineteenth-century moral-theological controversy.

The contrast between Frank's career and John's is of course striking, and Robbins constantly tries to persuade the reader (and perhaps himself) that it is illuminating. But here again the book falls short — not because Robbins' efforts are inept but because the contrast itself is so basic and so great. Once the brothers start on their wholly divergent intellectual-religious paths they really have nothing to say to one another — as John seemed to realize — and Robbins can do little more than point out that one is going one way, one the other, and that both are representative of main currents of nineteenth-century thought.

But if the divergence is intellectual it is also emotional, as Robbins himself in-

dicates time and again — most notably perhaps in his statement that "Frank could only have the last word by a kick at the Cardinal's bier." Although Robbins never enlarges upon this statement it seems to mean that Frank literally kicked the bier. In any event the kick was not Frank's last word. That came in 1891, with the publication of a little book entitled *Contributions Chiefly to the Early History of the Late Cardinal Newman* — a book in which, according to Robbins, Frank "set down every act or utterance that, to his mind, revealed strains of fanaticism or dishonesty . . ." The reason he gave for this attack, again according to Robbins, "was the danger that many uncritical people, especially young people, might be seduced by the Cardinal's great reputation . . ." The real or unspoken reason, Robbins explains, "was probably a sense of relief at releasing the accumulated resentments and irritations of a lifetime, which began when 'a most painful breach, through mere religious creed, broke on me in my nineteenth year, and was *unhealable*'."

Robbins' comment on Frank's statement — that the "word 'mere,' breaking the surface of the reflective mind, sets up historical ripples, ironic and unending" — helps to explain and justify Robbins' emphases in this "comparative biography," his choosing to trace the "historical ripples" and to "fall back" before the ground swells of hatred and frustration that underlie the ripples. His choice is a defensible one (the intellectual ripples are interesting and they make a good book) yet it is the present reviewer's opinion that a still more interesting book remains to be written — the book that will explain why Frank kicked the cardinal's bier.

ON THE EDGE, ON THE SURFACE

MARGARET ATWOOD, *The Circle Game*. Contact Press. \$3.00; paper \$2.00.

ROBERT FINCH, *Silverthorn Bush and Other Poems*. Macmillan. \$4.00.

A PHOTOGRAPH OF “blurred lines and grey flecks,” a scene vague in its details — some low hills, trees, a lake — with the poet “just under the surface” “difficult to say precisely where”: such is the landscape we are introduced to in the first poem of *The Circle Game*, and in the rest of the volume Margaret Atwood writes persistently of this uncertain and smeared world. Life holds on but only precariously; “cities are only outposts”, and the rows of ordered houses in suburbia, although they “neatly sidestep hysteria,” show signs of the “landscape behind or under / the future cracks in the plaster.” This “panic of suburb” may be a result of the notions of city planners “each in his own private blizzard / guessing directions.” Dangerous evolutionary menace lurks under the surface and it seems that whatever order we can impose will be only temporary. One means of survival may be movement; if we keep on the move, taking our collected lives of things and people with us, motion may keep us living:

I move
and live on the edges
(what edges)
I live
on all the edges there are

Our motions may be explorations into ourselves or into the regions of human relationships. Our meetings with friends and lovers, planned or accidental, are always difficult, if not downright destructive. “Love is an awkward word”, and Margaret Atwood’s poems about human relationships offer little hope; there is almost no real communication. Between human beings there are always “sheer cavernous / inches of air” but human feeling may exist “on a few / unintentional / spilled crumbs of love,” so we should keep attempting to discover what lurks under the surface of other human beings:

there are mountains
inside your skull
garden and chaos, ocean
and hurricane . . .
your private
dinosaurs.

But there is always distance, open water between islands; two islands “are alone / and always will be,” but “we find it pleasing / . . . that there are two of them.” We must try to journey across these straits even though we may travel in a circle — and yet the whole point of going round and round may be in simply going round and round. We are castaways on barren islands but we must somehow continue to explore and describe our journeys, even though we may be reduced to the bleached bones of one intermixed skeleton, even though the expression of our discoveries may be a self-defeating notion. Poetry may be only a game, another way of walking in circles:

and words here are as pointless
as calling in a vacant
wilderness

A poetry expressing these ideas will obviously have its own set of built-in

limitations and although the poet uses images of journeys, circles, games, and islands as a continual frame of reference, her poetry has a tentative air about it. The lines stop, pause, turn abruptly, hang unfinished, and the thought is sometimes interrupted by parenthetical statements and qualifications. One begins to long for a dogmatic statement, for the violence to break surface. Although Margaret Atwood lives "on all the edges there are," her poetry is not really "edgy," not anxiously nervy in spite of the halting quality achieved by the lining of the poems. Generally the poetry seems unruffled, and sometimes an incongruous placidity takes over. Yet the poems give a consistent vision in their ideas and there are individual poems (most notably those involving journeys and islands, and poems like "Some Objects of Wood and Stone" and "A Descent Through the Carpet") in which the language and the details of private and stunted landscapes really release the significance of the subject-matter. *The Circle Game*, in spite of its lack of variation in tone, is a volume well worth reading.

Robert Finch's world is also unruffled, even though he is obviously perturbed by certain manifestations of modernity. Nostalgia for a world untouched by anything modern is the dominant impression gained from a reading of *Silverthorn Bush and Other Poems*. One could accept the poet's attitudes if one felt that he is really annoyed about such things as jazzing Bach and Picasso's paintings, but no real anger breathes through the poems.

The verse is generally regular but there is no inner drive. The predominant form is the sonnet, written with some technical competence, yet many of these sonnets seem mere paltry exercises. There are

one or two neat lyrics and an occasional poem in which the wit works, but, generally speaking, this is a very dull volume indeed, expressed in staid language and flabby rhythms, often limp in its cataloguing of detail, often pointless in some of the attempts at humour and occasionally degenerating into embarrassing doggerel. One would rather live on the edges, however tentatively, than in the genteel, flat and regulated world of Mr. Finch.

PETER STEVENS

PARTY LINE OLSON

RICHARD CLARKE, *Fever and the Cold Eye*.
Toronto: Contact Press, 1966. 100 pp.
\$2.00.

Fever and the Cold Eye is an attempt in poetry by Richard Clarke to "sell" his own sensibility. This sensibility is party-line Charles Olson, not just in its admirable passivity (or "limpness") but in its equally unadmirable clinging to a narrow interpretation of Olson's conception of man as a participant in greater nature. Clarke's poems are about how he finds physical contact necessary for knowledge, how he senses with joy the teeming energy below and above the earth's crust, and how he views Buddhist concepts of stasis as unnatural. What is most obvious is that Clarke lacks Olson's magnanimity; while Olson makes such an attitude to life work — puts it to use in examining significant subjects outside itself — Clarke, perhaps still surprised at having mastered this attitude, can seldom get beyond demonstrating his possession of it. Clarke's error is not so much in accepting this attitude and sharing it with

many other young poets as it is in failing to apply it to significant subjects in his own experiential world. The objects presented in his poetry — snow, water, trees, music, women — lack particularity: they reveal no locus of either geography or person, and are hence anyone's objects. Even Clarke's breath-group line, though credibly written, lacks the individuality such a personality-projecting technique requires, and could itself be anyone's.

But although Clarke's sensibility and line both belong to a school rather than a man, and his subject is no more than the somewhat immodest celebration of this sensibility, it should be stressed that many of Clarke's poems are first-class examples of the kind of minor poetry that Charles Olson has inspired. First

books are frequently attempts toward technical mastery rather than originality, and, despite some melodrama (lxv), some awkward and pedantic appositives ("that is / meaning / primal human act" — xxviii), lapses in rhythm (lxvi), and some overpoweringly weighted one-word lines, *Fever and the Cold Eye* does reveal a mastery of a style of writing. In addition, it shows the mastery of a philosophy, so that what one gets here is simplified Charles Olson without his range or individuality but at least frequently with his competence. Clarke should be praised for the highly successful apprenticeship that this book reveals, but both he and his readers should ask for work that surpasses it.

FRANK DAVEY

THE PUBLICATIONS CENTRE

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A FREE CATALOGUE IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST.

CANADIAN ELITES

JOHN PORTER, *The Vertical Mosaic*. University of Toronto Press. \$15.00.

THE TRADE UNIONIST, admonished by editorial writers and chief justices alike to obey all laws and work through the established system to change those he does not like, is to be excused his derisive laughter. Although he may not know exactly why, the trade unionist does know that the established system is not his, and is unlikely to respond to his needs. His only recourse is to induce a need on the part of those for whom the system does work, and so, indirectly, achieve his ends. An unnecessarily complicated way of saying that labour leaders do not belong to the establishment perhaps, but a crucial point at a time when civil disobedience has almost become an accepted political weapon.

For most Canadians civil disobedience is sinful. Lulled by the myths of parliamentary democracy and the encomiums of the ruling elite, they cannot see how the system works for anyone if it does not work for all. And secretly they dislike trade unionists. John Porter, with a surgical precision marvelous in its restraint, skins the beast and shows the real ordering of its parts. The head does wag the tail — and run all the other operations as well.

Canada, we have been told, is not a melting pot, it is a mosaic. John Porter agrees. But it is a vertical mosaic. In Canada we have allowed all comers to retain their identities: "the old country" is a hallowed phrase in our land. But we insist upon a hierarchy within the mosaic,

and our top people, whom Porter labels "the charter group", are the British. The French do constitute a separate charter group but it is only recently that they have begun to clamour for a place at the top of the Canadian mosaic. Immigration to Canada has always had a British preference built in. The Canadian establishment has, for the most part, been drawn from this charter group and, consequently, accepted the myths of the racial superiority of the British and the political superiority of British institutions.

Porter is not making a case against the establishment; this book is no polemic. It ranks as a major contribution to scholarship. At the outset Professor Porter makes explicit his personal values. He attaches "great importance to equality of opportunity on both ethical and practical grounds." His values do not detract from his study, however; they lend to it a cogency which many similar studies lack. What he discovered, and documents with care, is that "Canadians of British origin have retained, within the elite structure of the society, the charter group status with which they started out. . . ."

Through an examination of the several elites which exist in Canada, Porter verifies his thesis and demonstrates the dominance of the values of this prime charter group. The economic, political and ideological elites — the operators of the mass media, the clergy and the "clerisy of the higher learning" — are not only drawn from the charter group, but are interlocking through shared positions and shared values. Members of academic communities will be well enough aware of the fact that "those intellectuals who are powerful within the ideological system are the traditionalists, the clerisy, the

ideologists, the conservatives." And those who have listened to colleagues debating reform of university government will know that arguments from the "window on the world" or "community representation" thesis, are really the defensive reactions of the establishment faced with demands from the utopians.

And as access to the centres of power in the church and university is denied the outsider, so too is access to the media of communication, "except under controlled situations when they are presented as curiosities." Without explicitly stating it, Porter documents the frustration of the utopian or the outsider in an inward-looking society where the institutions of democracy are designed to produce reinforcements for the establishment, and only safety-valves for the avant-garde. Popping-off is an acceptable and amusing pastime. This frustration produced, and no doubt still produces, the "alienated intellectual" who in the thirties buttressed the CCF, and who today may be involved with the NDP but likely finds more to his tastes in the crypto-anarchism of other less formalized groupings.

The trade union leader is an outsider. In terms of his socio-economic status this is so, and measured by his acceptance by the charter group elites, it is equally true. Trade unionism is anti-property and is seen within the context of conventional wisdom as corrosive. The labour elite is only an elite within the labour movement. Trade union leaders are seldom on university boards of governors, and are infrequently invited to serve on respected community directorates such as symphony boards, community chests and their like. And when they are, there is more than a suspicion of the same kind

of tokenism that leads television producers to include negroes in walk-on parts. There are no newspapers that support the aims of organized labour with the same consistency that the aims of business are supported. It is typical that all work stoppages are called strikes, whether management or labour called the halt. And strikes, it is known, are bad.

When sentenced by the courts for ignoring injunctions, and admonished to seek change the democratic way, the trade unionists, like the rest of the outsiders in Quebec and elsewhere, recognize that with the system closed to them and hostile to their interests, they have no strength but their determination to resist, and no hope but in their numbers.

This clear and dispassionate analysis of the power structure in Canadian society is more than welcome. For the outsiders it does not offer any remedy, but it does show where the enemy is.

WALTER YOUNG

DUALITÉ CANADIENNE

RAMSAY COOK, *Canada and the French-Canadian Question*. Macmillan. \$4.95.

AFTER A YEAR ABROAD, six months of it spent in Australia, I knew I was home when I read Ramsay Cook's nine essays entitled *Canada and the French-Canadian Question*. Professor Cook sees this as *the* Canadian question, the one upon which all others submissively depend, and he's quite right, and the Australians deep in their Pacific hideout have caught on to the idea too, because the question

they usually asked me after "What do Canadians think about Vietnam?" was "What about the French Canadians?" In 1891 Goldwin Smith examined the logic of the forces which, as he was in fact quite pleased to note, would in due time make Canada a part of the United States, and he called his book *Canada and the Canadian Question*. I should think Professor Cook was aware of that title in choosing his own. The shift in the question underlines both the achievement and the failure of the years between: the question of Canadian-American relations has been at least partly answered, though not (not yet at any rate) in the way Goldwin Smith expected; the question of French-English relations has taken on such urgency that it threatens from within a new kind of deadly tension whose outcome might well be the end which Goldwin Smith foresaw.

I wish I had had Professor Cook's book with me in Australia. Which is to say, as the jacket immodestly tells us, that the book is "brilliantly informed." We are offered the services of an extremely capable historian who knows well the boundaries of his discipline. If he has a sermon to preach, it will be only incidental to his *explication de texte*. "One of the articles of an historian's faith," Professor Cook says at the outset, "is that people would find the present less mysterious if they had a fuller understanding of the past." French and English in Canada, he suggests, do not know enough about each other's history. They must be instructed, not so much in the expectation of immediate solutions to problems as in the more modest hope that knowledge will enable them to identify accurately the problems which confront them, by this means providing the

without-which-not for rational discourse. It is rational discourse that Professor Cook wants, and he sets the pace admirably—in his balanced assessment of the intentions of the Founding Fathers, in his dispassionate accounts of co-operative federalism and separatism and the theory of associate states, in his marvellously sympathetic and perceptive studies of the work of Canon Groulx, Henri Bourassa, Michel Brunet, Pierre-Elliott Trudeau and André Laurendeau, to name only those least known to English-language readers.

Is it all without conclusion, then? Not at all. Misconception removed and true history recorded, the question can be put in its proper terms. Lord Acton, quoted more than once in this book, is the mentor from a hundred years ago. "The coexistence," Lord Acton had written, "of several nations under the same state is the test, as well as the best security of its freedom," "Can we," Professor Cook asks, "devise the terms of a partnership that will measure up to Lord Acton's yardstick?" He thinks we can, if reason and the will of God prevail. Nationalism is the plague which has infected both houses. The Founding Fathers had it right, with their conception both of a strong central government and of a nation-state (not a nationalist-state) which would embrace a *dualité canadienne*. Professor Cook does not find the goals of a strong central government and a nation-state antagonistic. Some may. There will at any rate be no need, in his opinion, to rewrite the constitution (though amendments may be necessary) if we will simply set about finding "institutions that will give full expression to the cultural duality of the Canadian nation-state," and if we will at the same

time accept the idea that Quebec, and indeed any province, can quite readily be treated differently from other provinces. That's the message which emerges from the *explication*. It is a noble and rational vision, and both its nobility and sweet reasonableness recall Matthew Arnold, with whom Professor Cook has some affinity, as also with Goldwin Smith. Yet, to take the nearer case, Goldwin Smith's rational argument for the annexation of Canada to the United States was of no avail, so that one is given to think that perhaps some of our better responses have been irrational. The moral of this is not that I think Professor Cook wrong; it is rather that I would temper the rationalist's optimism (was it Heine who said that we learn from history that we do not learn from history?) with a reminder that one of the best known antidotes to irrationality remains the supreme irrationality of love for one's neighbours, whom one may or may not, after all, find reasonable.

ROBERT L. MC DOUGALL

AGGRESSIVE INDIVIDUALIST

JEAN LE MOYNE, *Essays from Quebec. Convergence*. Translation by Philip Stratford. Ryerson. \$4.00.

WHEN IN 1962 the Montreal critic and journalist Jean Le Moyne published in French his collection of essays, *Convergences*, it was immediately apparent that this was one of the most important volumes of serious writing ever to have appeared in French Canada. Now, four years later, Philip Stratford has given us an admirable English translation of Le

Moyne's book, making it available to a much wider Canadian audience.

The English version, under the title *Essays from Quebec. Convergence* (in the singular), is handsomely produced by The Ryerson Press in Toronto, and is a further indication of that publisher's discriminating attention to French-Canadian thought and letters. It opens with a revised and expanded 1966 Foreword by the author, setting forth his conviction that despite recent changes in Quebec, "the spiritual forces that conditioned French Canadians to become what they were ten, twenty or thirty years ago still validly explain, directly or dialectically, their present state", an affirmation that several of the essays will bear out. Next follows a brief Translator's Preface to introduce the work of this writer who is remarkably little known even in his native Montreal. It is to be hoped that Professor Stratford will one day expand his introductory note and thus provide us with the first English study of Jean Le Moyne.

There are twenty-seven essays and articles in this English edition, including three replacements for pieces dropped from the original book. The earliest, "The Marx Brothers", dates from 1941; the most recent, an eloquent exposition of the centrality of Easter in Christian thought, was written in 1964. The majority belong to the decade from 1950 to 1961, and, unlike most French-Canadian essays, embrace a wide variety of subjects: the author's youth, the role of journalism, French, English and American literature, French-Canadian culture, anticlericalism, Zionism, Teilhard de Chardin, negro spirituals, Schubert, Wagner, Beethoven, Mozart and Bach. On all these topics Le Moyne displays a breadth

of information and a mastery of ideas that are a refreshing change from the work of earlier Quebec essayists, whose writing was frequently depressingly parochial and distressingly superficial.

The uncompromising independence of Le Moyne's views on his compatriots sometimes leaves the English reader gasping. The latter's stereotyped notions of French-Canadian ethnic solidarity cannot readily absorb statements such as this:

It is extremely disagreeable for me to have to state that my incursions into the world of French-Canadian literature are, more often than not, forced visits, made out of a sense of duty and professional obligation; that on such occasions I find very little to feed on, and what there is, is usually perfectly unappetizing. I should also add that I could forego these visits entirely without feeling the slightest lack of any basic nourishment.

Or this:

Be it new and justified, or retrograde and evil-natured, the spirit of nationalism is always a manifestation of the rankly primitive.

And particularly this:

There is no shortage of would-be Francos among us here (they run to type, even to the size), and one shudders at the thought of what would happen if French Canadians constituted themselves an independent state.

The same aggressive individualism characterizes Le Moyne's reflections on all subjects, and no doubt helps to account for his impassioned tribute to the Jewish people ("The Return to Israel"), which reads like a modern amplification of Pascal's famous passage. Yet for all his individualism, Le Moyne is not an iconoclast, and does not hit out blindly. There

is a discernible "convergence" in his writings upon a central theme that is almost an obsession with him: his search for a cosmic unity symbolized by the Incarnation and threatened by dualism. It comes as no surprise to the reader that Le Moyne and Saint-Denis Garneau were contemporaries and close friends. Some passages of this book, particularly those concerned with the transparency of reality, or those devoted to music, are very reminiscent of parts of Saint-Denis Garneau's *Journal*, and one of the most personal essays in the volume is a scathing denunciation of the spiritual assassins of Le Moyne's poet-friend.

Le Moyne's metaphysical preoccupations, his highly personal point of view, and his considerable powers of penetration and analysis would be sufficient to make his writing dense and difficult. When these qualities find expression in language at times tersely aphoristic and at others convoluted in its abstraction, the result is calculated to try the reader's patience and to drive the translator to distraction. It is greatly to Professor Stratford's credit that he emerges from this struggle with a lucid English version that omits almost nothing found in the original and adds only what is indispensable to our understanding. There are a few Gallicisms ("parents", p. 30; "ignore", pp. 39, 218; "insupportable", p. 122; "desert", p. 179; "the compliment he once *made*", p. 148), and the odd slip ("réalités charnelles" are not "fleshy" realities, pp. 45, 46; "Pierre Kalm" should be "Per Kalm", pp. 73-77; "Aramenians" should be "Arameans", p. 143; etc.) but these are of little importance and do not detract from an excellent translation of an important book.

DAVID M. HAYNE

UNE SORTE DE MYTHE

PIERRE PAGE, *Anne Hébert*. Collection Ecrivains d'Aujourd'hui, Editions Fides.

C'EST ACCEPTER une énorme gageure que d'écrire un livre sur Anne Hébert, surtout lorsque l'on veut expliciter les multiples aspects de l'œuvre (poésie, théâtre et roman) et les relier, dans la mesure du possible à l'évolution spirituelle de l'auteur.

Une énorme gageure, car l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert, qui est de très haute qualité, ne se laisse pas facilement analyser; ce n'est pas une œuvre simple et candide. D'autre part, il s'est créé autour d'Anne Hébert, depuis *Le Tombeau des Rois* principalement, une sorte de mythe,

plus encore une auréole. Il n'est pratiquement pas permis — comme ce fut et c'est encore le cas pour Saint-Denys Garneau — de parler d'Anne Hébert et de commenter ses livres si l'on ne fait pas partie d'une certaine alliance. Une fois admis dans ce cénacle, il faudra cependant en respecter les règles. Tout cela me semble fort loin de l'auteur lui-même qui est une femme aux belles qualités de cœur, d'intelligence et de vie. Et, pour le cas qui nous occupe, un excellent écrivain. Anne Hébert n'a pas du tout, à mon sens, la petite assiette illuminée que tous ceux qui ont le droit de parler de son œuvre lui appliquent immédiatement derrière la tête.

Tout cela pour dire que M. Pierre Pagé qui a publié, il y a quelques mois, cette étude sur Anne Hébert n'échappe pas à la règle, malgré l'excellence de son

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UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS

travail, un peu scolaire cependant. Il parle d'elle comme d'une vestale, et de son œuvre comme s'il s'agissait de *la Divine Comédie*.

Si nous oublions cette déférence excessive, nous constatons que l'analyse de l'œuvre d'Anne Hébert est faite avec beaucoup de scrupules et avec le souci constant de démonter tous les mécanismes d'écriture et d'inspiration; mais le livre, se dit-on, s'adresse surtout aux étudiants. A la fin de l'ouvrage, un bon choix de textes et un peu partout des photos de l'auteur qui sont belles et révélatrices.

M. Pierre Pagé cherche constamment des significations là où il n'y a parfois que des émotions et des images pures. Il érige trop en système tout ce qu'écrit Anne Hébert. Il ne lui concède pas suffisamment de la fantaisie que l'on accorde généralement aux poètes, même aux plus graves, et lui confie constamment des missions. L'admiration qu'il voue à cette œuvre — même si elle est en bonne partie justifiée — finit par indisposer le lecteur.

L'aspect biographique, excellemment mais trop rapidement esquissé, dans le premier chapitre de ce livre, aurait mérité de compléter l'analyse des textes tout au long de l'ouvrage.

Ajoutons que la bibliographie finale semble très complète et que ce livre, malgré encore une fois son caractère un peu trop didactique, est le premier ouvrage sérieusement consacré à Anne Hébert. C'est beaucoup.

JEAN-GUY PILON

DEGREES OF AFFIRMATION

RICHARD OUTRAM, *Exsultate, Jubilate*. Macmillan. \$4.25.

READERS OF *Alphabet* and *Poetry* who have been impressed by the work of Richard Outram will welcome these sixty-one poems brought together in a handsome volume under the general title of *Exsultate, Jubilate*. The note of affirmation which the title proclaims is capable of double justification, for in one sense the poems progress from an internal darkness shot through by incomprehensible light, to a provisional conclusion which accepts the positive aspects of fragmentation. In another sense, all the aspects of existence to which Mr. Outram responds are present from the beginning, so that each of the four sections, and nearly every individual poem, is a form of provisional affirmation.

The four lines of the dedication appropriately incorporate many of the themes and images which recur throughout the poems:

Flames, in a green night flowering,
Are scarlet raiment for a child who lies
Beside his dying father and stares down,
Within the encroaching blackness.

The thirteen poems of the first section, "Mute Woman", present multi-faceted parallelisms of both opposed and co-existing relatives and absolutes; "Grace is present everywhere" but it is deduced from an exodus — a non-being. Any attempt at synthesis or system dislocates, "out of sequence" by the unwinding of "imperfect revelations". The first Adam has to seek respite from Eve, for the search for the completion of Self through

means which are outside the Self only emphasizes the horror of the realization that "one is any number". The search for perfection, necessarily conducted by imperfect means, threatens chaos and nihilism within a closed system where every value posits its opposite.

In "Vision and Mystery", the lions of power guard the slumber of powerlessness, but, should consciousness return, immobile perfection is destroyed by the imperfection of change implied in movement. As a consequence, the lions

Knowing how flame must follow at her side,
Will turn relentlessly and savage her
for Love.

Though the Unicorn is "raked by God's claws", this is not yet the vision of Christ the Tiger; it is still a world of division where the questions are more important than the answers. It is also one where man, alone, as a latter-day Flying Dutchman and Noah, with a cargo of beasts below deck, unable to make port, is spiritedly fishing for Leviathan (with an aspect of the self for bait), confident, not of landing the absolute in his net, but of using its power and sense of direction to tow him to port after singing "one old song." But the whale is not yet caught, and the song is still unremembered. One is left with "Mute Woman", possessor of the lethal flame holding promise of new creation from the fertile dark of chaos come again.

The second and third sections — "Widdershins" and "Primer" — elaborate these themes within an impressively extended metaphysical range and an increasing sureness of technique. The assurance of certainty is no nearer: the universe withdraws from the man who attempts to touch the sun, leaving him scorched. The gong resounds, but, as in Forster's Mara-

bar Caves, the "semblance of the sound is lost". Man is set in a green world (green dust, green light, green wrangle, green torrent, lucent jade, emerald weeds) which betrays him if he comes to rely on it; set both with and against the green world is the redness of the bird, blood, fire, blade, rage, pulse which sets him on to possess, kill, absorb, lust, choose, betray — perhaps, love — to "challenge with / The brute fact of my being, my own Myth."

Constantly feeling betrayed by metaphor, lamenting the degradation of the ideal by the apparently real, he finds, as the artist always has, that by the paradigm — the Word — the ravaged selves are exorcised and enabled to act. The nightmare of "Widdershins" appears at first glimpse to be close to that of the Australian Judith Wright's bullock-driver, who endured hardship through the years "till they ran widdershins in his brain" turning to a "mad apocalyptic dream" peopled with fiends and angels. But Mr. Outram's vision of a world of formless separation provides one point of reference: a blazing axis which imperfectly mirrors back one's own eye. This image becomes, in a later poem "Childhood", the crystal with which the "elaborate game" of faceted and pigeon-holed truth is played, each facet reflecting "our own eye magnified". The crystal and the mirror and the eye must all be shattered for them to release the light that is in them, and in the final section, "Exsultate, Jubilare", affirmation becomes more pronounced.

If the way to totality lies through fragmentation, the external world provides examples enough. "Ultimate darkness" can be seen, again through the agency of crystal, to be "enfolded in single, if mul-

multiple fires". The perfection of the magician's performance in "Prestidigitator" had evoked no response from the audience, for his apparent miracles had no relevance to an order where (to use D. C. Scott's image) "the tenebrous sky was founded on lightning." In the final poem of the volume, the juggler's ball is dropped, its fragments and his tears at its loss spread through the universe as points of light. This time the audience applauds. Mr. Outram has found in these scattered fragments the "light behind the eye" which informs more completely than the objective flashing circle of imposed Procrustean synthesis.

It would be interesting to consider Mr. Outram's use of water imagery against the background of Milton Wilson's discussion of the drowned poet theme in Canadian poetry. Equally, there is much to be said on the complex interweaving of aspects of the polarities which are established. Stillness and movement, speech and silence—the expected juxtapositions never have the expected significance. As good poems should, these transform the reader's expectations to an acceptance of their own internal order. We shall be hearing a lot more of Mr. Outram in the future.

JOHN MATTHEWS

ON THE VERGE

INEVITABLY, as the months build up towards Centennial year, the *marginalia* of Canadian publishing consists more and more of books that reflect a revived in-

terest in special and local areas of history. The most impressive of a tall pile of this kind of literature now before us is Edwin G. Guillet's *The Story of Canadian Roads* (\$8.50), a well-designed and well-illustrated history of roads and road transport published by the University of Toronto Press and sponsored by the Canadian Good Roads Association. Mr. Guillet has in the past shown himself a social historian of great erudition and considerable stylistic charm, and the book he now presents demonstrates these qualities so long as he deals with what is distant and long ago. But when Mr. Guillet comes to the great, smooth roads of today his eloquence deserts him. However much he may dilate on the advantages of such an efficient present over the uncomfortable pioneer past, it is still of the past that he writes with the feeling and ease of familiarity.

Less wide in its geographical sweep, even more close and personal in its appeal, is *The Winter Years* by James H. Gray (Macmillan, \$4.95). Mr. Gray went through the mill of the Thirties, and was ground small in the Winnipeg relief system until he found a new career as a journalist and then, as a reporter for the *Free Press*, witnessed the wider dimensions of the Depression, the great desiccation of South Saskatchewan during the drought years, and the rise in Saskatchewan and Alberta of the two radical movements, C.C.F. and Social Credit, which have so deeply influenced the politics of western Canada in the last generation. A modest, mordant account by a man who saw, remembered and knows how to record an era which seems as strange and distant to the young today as the Black Death or the Great Fire of London.

CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1966



A CHECKLIST EDITED BY RITA BUTTERFIELD

ENGLISH-CANADIAN

LITERATURE

Compiled by Rita Butterfield

COLLECTIONS

- BISSELL, CLAUDE THOMAS (comp.) Great Canadian writing; a century of imagination. [Toronto, Canadian Centennial Pub., 1966]. (The Canadian centennial library) 127 p.
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